

**A body and a dream:
West African youth, mobility and
football trafficking**

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Declaration

I, James H N Esson confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Football trafficking, particularly the exploitation of male West African youth, has become the object of much recent academic and political concern. This thesis provides an alternative theorisation and counter narrative to the neo-classical and structural historical theories that dominate accounts of football trafficking, and African football migration more generally. These dominant accounts ignore migrant agency and subjectivity, as well as abstracting football migration from broader social relationships. By doing so, they cast migration and development as antagonistic, and seek to solve the problem of trafficking by returning young migrants home. This approach is diametrically opposed to the migratory disposition of young African males, who see development as freedom through spatial mobility. The alternative framework for understanding football migration elaborated in this thesis thus places central emphasis on the subjectivity and agency of West African male youth, as these are shaped by broader socio-economic contexts, such as the racial and gendered signification of sport. Contrary to arguments based on structural historical theories and anti-trafficking policies, this thesis shows that young West African males are not migrating just because of neo-colonial relations in the footballing political economy, nor because traffickers dupe them. Rather than casting these young West African males as passive victims, or stressing their commodification, the thesis portrays them as ‘entrepreneurs of self’, who actively try to migrate through football because they see it as a means of overcoming the uncertainty and constraints on life ambitions facing them in Africa. The thesis takes the form of a ‘critical ethnography of migration’. It is based on field research with male African youth in Accra (Ghana) and explores how and why they are drawn into the football industry, and follows the trajectory of young African players to Europe, explicitly Paris (France).

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List of Acronyms

CAF:	The Confederation of African Football
CFS:	Culture Foot Solidaire
EU:	The European Union
FIFA:	International Federation of Association Football
Gafa:	The Ghanaian Amateur Football Association
GFA:	Ghanaian Football Association
GHALCA:	The Ghana League Cubs Association
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
PFPA:	Professional Footballers Association of Ghana
PFPO:	Professional Football Players Observatory
SAP:	Structural Adjustment Programme
RTD:	Right to Dream Academy
UCL:	University College London
UEFA:	The Union of European Football Associations
UN:	The United Nations

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I never held you in my arms, but I will forever hold you in my heart



1.0 Introduction

Ghanaians Footballers Stranded In Mauritius

Source: Daily Guide Accra

Sports News | Thu, 04 Aug 2011- By Adam Coe and Jonathan Wiser

AMBITIOUS GHANAIANS were scammed into thinking they had trials at football clubs in Mauritius last year, a DAILY GUIDE SPORTS investigation has uncovered. The players were sent with the promise of a trial abroad and cheated out of thousands of Ghana Cedis for the privilege. When they arrived in Mauritius, there was no such 'invitation' and some have been imprisoned for staying illegally in the country. Our source says the footballers were not of a high standard.

An email from Nazeer Bowud, Treasurer of the Mauritian FA dated 25th March, 2010 says: 'There is unfortunately some wrong minded 'agents' in Ghana who organize these types of trip for footballers to Mauritius and promise them to use Mauritius as a hub to transit to Europe.' After arrival in Mauritius, the money they parted with did not lead to the glorious careers they desired, as the 'invitation' turned out to be fake. Cash advances provided by hopeful footballers for the 'agent' led instead to poverty for their families and extended criminal stays in foreign countries.

Emmanuel Gyimah, Deputy General Secretary of the Ghana Football Association (GFA) confirmed the reports as true saying contact had been made with the Mauritian FA. The fraud continued, and a fake invitation obtained by DAILY GUIDE SPORTS for one Rama Dela Kobla Kudulo states he will be considered 'in the context of skills evaluation and eventual recruitment'.

It is unknown how many footballers were duped into taking up the offer in Mauritius but according to Rama's former coach, Dominic Baltisser, the figure could be over 70.

1.1 The scandal of Africa's trafficked players

I decided to begin this thesis by documenting the plight of aspirant footballers who found themselves facing jail, rather than facing opponents on a football pitch. My reason for doing so, was because the idea that migration through football can reduce an individual's autonomy and lead to exploitative practices, is best grasped through a real life example. The article encapsulates what first sparked my interest in African football migration, when I read 'The scandal of Africa's trafficked players' by Dan McDougall in *The Observer* on the 06/01/2008. McDougall drew upon examples from Ghana to highlight the growing concern amongst charities and NGOs, regarding what they perceived as the trafficking of African football players, some as young as 11 years old. In recent years this concern regarding exploitative migratory practices in the football industry, known as football trafficking, has generated a surge of academic, political and media interest (Ali 2008; Darby et al. 2007; Haynes 2008; McDougall 2010; Poli 2010b; Rawlinson 2009; Scherrens 2007; Sparre 2007a). McDougall argues that this migratory practice is creating 'a tragic legacy of homeless young boys across major European capitals' (McDougall 2008). I was perplexed by McDougall's piece, and as a Ghanaian by birth the article touched a personal nerve. I had grown accustomed to the sight of African football players in elite European leagues, with their presence eliciting little if any deeper reflection. I endeavoured to learn more about the migration of African football players, a decision that served as the catalyst for this study.

It is estimated that since 2005 there have been more than 1000 cases of football trafficking in Paris alone (Poli 2010a), and approximately 7000 across France (Sparre 2007a). These figures are from the organisation Culture Foot Solidaire (CFS), which was founded in 2001 by Jean-Claude Mbvoumin, a former Cameroonian international player. The organisation aims to support young African players allegedly trafficked or unsuccessful in their trials with European football clubs. As with all statistics, particularly those concerning 'hidden populations' i.e. members of society who may be associated with illegal or stigmatised activities, these figures should be treated with caution (Aronowitz 2001; Tyldum & Brunovskis 2005). Nevertheless, with regards to the cases in Paris, CFS claims that 98 percent are illegal immigrants, and 70 percent are under the age of 18. Football trafficking is therefore an irregular form of migration, 'as it includes people who enter a country without the proper authority; people who remain in a country in contravention of their authority; people moved by migrant smugglers or human trafficking' (Koser 2010, p.183). Yet Raffaele Poli, a researcher at the Professional Football

Players Observatory (PFPO), notes that academics and policy makers frequently explain football trafficking in terms of neo-colonial exploitation (Bale 2004; Darby 2007; Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001), a perspective that stems from the use of structural historical theories such as dependency and world systems to theorize regular forms of African football migration (where movement is directly linked to legitimate recruitment operated by a foreign club and players enter a destination country legally).

A sedentary bias underlies these accounts and they frame migration as a problem to be solved rather than a phenomenon to be studied. Influenced by dependency and world systems literature, researchers studying the migration of African football players claim that the process is one of neocolonial sourcing, refinement, and export of a raw material (in this case the African football player). This process allows for their consumption and the generation of wealth in the core (Europe), while concurrently impoverishing the periphery (Africa). It is claimed that this results in a muscle drain of African football talent (Andreff 2002; Darby 2007; Guest 2009; Scherrens 2007; cf Poli 2008). A lobby comprising leading figures from within the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), the Confederation of African Football (CAF), human rights groups and sections of the liberal European press, propose that by developing the African football political economy and overcoming its 'culture of mediocrity' i.e. endemic corruption, inadequate infrastructure and political economy in relation to its European counterpart (Mahjoub 1992 cited in Darby et al. 2007), African players will be more inclined to stay at home (limiting supply). The exploitative practices of clubs (European) and football agents that cause underdevelopment at the level of the individual migrant player will then cease (less demand), thus solving the issue of all forms of inter-continental African football migration. This stance is a microcosm of the broader discourse on the relationship between migration and development, more specifically the idea that development in Africa will keep Africans in Africa (Bakewell 2007).

The use of neo-classical and historical structural theories to comprehend this form of migration is appealing. This is due to their ability to illustrate a general picture of the football political economy and migratory patterns of African football players (especially to Europe). Problematically, however, they create a scenario whereby these migrants are construed as responding mechanically to structural forces beyond their control. Similar sentiments are also applicable with regards to the issue of football trafficking, where again the agency of the players themselves is peripheral and hidden behind the label trafficking. As a result human subjectivities are frequently

conspicuous by their absence. Moreover, the migratory process is almost always theorised from the perspective of the West (a noticeable exception is Poli 2010a), which leads to a receiving country bias. Yet, the growing number of players found in Asia (Fottrell 2012; Poli 2010a), is testament to a more complex picture than drawn in top-heavy determinist accounts. Lastly, a key factor that is left largely unaccounted for in these historical structural theories, and the essentialist analyses and solutions that emerge from the 'culture of mediocrity' perspective, is that the desire to migrate might be linked to a wider context beyond the footballing political economy.

There is one notable attempt to theorize African football migration without resorting to structural historical theories. Poli (2005) sought to use a global commodity chain (GCC) analysis to conceptualize this migration. Referring to another human being as a commodity, particularly those of African descent, may seem inappropriate. Yet football players do resemble commodities in that they appear to be produced in training grounds and academies, traded via formal and informal transfer markets, and consumed during sporting spectacles.

Poli abandoned the GCC approach because its structural and economic determinism and semantic imprecision were unable to accommodate the human element of this commodity, namely agency and subjectivity. Thus it could not account for how media coverage of African football players at European clubs, and the associated cult of stardom attached to their lifestyles, enhances the illusion of football as a realistic and accessible means of upward social mobility and social success (Poli 2010a; Darby et al. 2007). Nor could it account for how a career in football bestows African males with elevated social status, and the potential to become an influential national figure (Poli 2010a). The career of Ivorian Didier Drogba, a former Chelsea FC football player, exemplifies this point. Drogba was famously (not necessarily correctly) credited with ending the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire. Moreover, events such as the 2010 Football World Cup held in South Africa are believed to constitute a contemporary 'mythification' of football as a means of social ascension for African youth (Poli, 2010a), and a perpetuation of what Manzo (2010¹) terms the 'mantra of hope' ascribed to football as a tool for development in the continent.

¹ 'Icons of Hope: Imaging Development through Football'. Paper presented at the conference 'Visualizing the Game. Global Perspectives on African Football', Basle, Switzerland, January 2010.

These theoretical reflections on football migration leave two key questions unanswered. Firstly, what happens if we move beyond structural historical theories and incorporate the subjectivities of African males? Secondly, how is it possible for analysts to have so systematically ignored migrant subjectivity, cultural meanings of football and mobility, and the social context beyond the economic?

1.2 An alternative framework for understanding African football migration

In this thesis I argue that contrary to arguments based on structural historical theories and anti-trafficking policies, young West African males are not migrating just because of neo-colonial relations in the footballing political economy, nor because they are duped by unscrupulous traffickers. I argue that young West African males are seeking to migrate because they want to be mobile, and they consider football to be a means to achieve this. The exploitative structures that some analysts of African football migration attempt to unveil by limiting the role of subjective representations, and by framing the migrant as a commodity or raw material, do indeed influence migration. Yet the human dimension of this migratory process means that subjective representations and the wider social context must be taken into account, because they also influence how young African males react to, conserve, or transform these very structures as part of a dialectic relationship between structure and agency. This thesis seeks to show that by ignoring migrant subjectivity, and viewing migration as being distinct from broader social relationships and the way they change over time, we maintain the perception that migration and development are antagonistic. This creates a tension, as the latter position is diametrically opposed to the migratory disposition of young African males, who see development as freedom through spatial mobility.

I provide an alternative framework and counter narrative to the structural historical theories that currently dominate the literature on African football migration. I do so by bringing together insights from four relevant but currently unexplored literatures in relation to African football migration, namely: the meaning of commodities; migrant subjectivity and agency; young people in the Global South; and the racial and gendered signification of sport. Incorporating theoretical insights from these literatures provides a means to think through the significance of the circumstances preceding movement, and situate the desire to migrate through football within a historical, political, economic and cultural context. In doing so, I use the African football migrant

to suggest new ways of thinking about the meaning of commodities. In particular, I build on critiques of theoretical attempts to ‘unveil the commodity fetish’, which is an intellectual project that aims to make visible the hidden injustices of commodity production by locating the appropriation of labour. The commodity fetish seeks to make known that which the commodity hides, and it sees the process of unveiling the content of the commodity as the final goal of analysis (Page 2005).

The utility of theoretical attempts to understand the meaning of commodities (which football players resemble) is because they confirm the importance of acknowledging the interrelated nature of economic trade, politics and cultural meanings, and the wider social contexts from which the movement of commodities originate. Moreover, critiques of the ‘commodity fetish’ provide a means to explain why it is possible for structural historical theories and anti-trafficking campaigns to discount migrant agency, subjectivity, and the wider social context. Problematically, however, the commodities literature is primarily concerned with non-human objects, thus like the historical structural theories that I seek to elaborate upon, it is unable to address a key peculiarity of a footballer in relation to other commodities, the human dimension.

I argue that in the football industry neoliberal capitalism’s model of exchange and value extends itself to include the individual, in this case the football player who is sold and traded between clubs. However, this does not instigate a commodification of self, rather the individual becomes an enterprise, an ‘entrepreneur of self’ (Foucault 2008). I argue that it is only possible to know this by relocating our reference point away from structural and economic analysis fixated with modes of production and exchange, and instead engaging with the subjectivities of African youth. This shift in perspective is important, because by engaging with the subjectivities of African youth it is possible to move beyond the notion of the football player as a commodity or raw material, and provide a more adequate way to conceptualise migrants within this industry. It allows us to shed light on how male Ghanaian youths now see a career in football as a way to avoid an education system they believe will lead to unemployment, or unacceptable employment in the feminized informal economy. A career in football is also seen as a way to demonstrate their masculinity, specifically, displays of wealth through conspicuous consumption, behaviour that young Ghanaians refer to as ‘living the X-Way’. Male youth in Ghana view the modern, black West African professional football player, who is able to utilize his natural sporting ‘bodily capital’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) and live the ‘X-Way’, as

embodying ideals of manhood and the notion of development as freedom through spatial mobility.

The notion of the football player as an 'entrepreneur of self' builds on theorisations that view migrants as agentic, rather than as victims of migration regimes (Sharma 2003; Skilbrei & Tveit 2008), and understandings of the uncertainty and constraints on life ambitions facing young people residing in Africa and the Global South more generally (Gough 2008; Jeffrey 2011; Langevang 2008). These insights are not only useful because they add a human dimension to conceptualisations of African football migration, they are also necessary because dominant accounts and narratives of African football migration hinge on the actions of children and youth in their early to mid twenties (Darby et al. 2007; McDougall 2010; Letsch 2011; McDougall 2008; Rawlinson 2009). Yet dominant accounts of African football migration have ignored debates over agency and young people in the Global South. I avoid this shortcoming within this thesis by investigating the subjectivities of prospective footballers prior to movement, and I situate the desire to migrate through football within a particular local context that treats the political, economic and cultural spheres as fundamentally interwoven.

I use a narrative of historical change to shed light on contemporary dynamics taking place in Ghanaian football migration. This is significant, as I shift understandings of African football migration away from the receiving country bias and depictions of African countries as passive. I argue that changes in the political economy of international professional football are understood, transformed and rejected within Ghana itself, as part of broader social changes occurring within the country. For Ghanaians, the perception of football as a way to attain spatial and thus social mobility coincided with an era in which the model for economic development was enacted through neoliberalism, in the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs). In contrast to the pre SAP era, contemporary Ghanaian football is in an era of 'financialization', with speculation centered on youth players and their registration cards. I use insights from theorisations of youth in the Global South to argue that in a social context devoid of state welfare and shaped by neoliberal reform, the belief that football offers a means to create an income and be self-sufficient is very appealing to young West African males. This belief comes to the fore during the transition from junior to senior secondary school, 'a vital conjuncture', which is a 'socially structured zone of possibility that emerges around specific periods of potential transformation in a life or lives' (Johnson-Hanks 2002, p.871). It is at this moment in the life course that

male Ghanaian youth 'drop out of school' and attempt to become 'entrepreneurs of self' within the football industry.

The challenge that young Ghanaian would-be footballers face is that increased competition from others, and the duplicitous acts of opportunistic fraudsters, mean that it is difficult to gain legitimate opportunities to migrate through football. A key empirical insight that emerges from engaging with young Ghanaian males (as opposed to treating them as a raw material or commodity), and which contributes to existing theorisations of agency and youthful subjectivities, is that these young males overcome uncertainty within Ghanaian football by employing a form of social navigation known as 'trying your luck'. This entails making use of a distinguishable talent or skill (in this case football) and the spiritual realm, which alongside money are the key to success in contemporary Ghana. Problematically, a tension emerges between striving for proprietorship of one's self, and the notion that a person is to a large extent operated through spiritual powers (see also Meyer 1998). Young Ghanaian footballers often try to overcome this contradiction by engaging with both the spiritual realm and scientific training methods, the latter being connected to notions of race and gender. Thus agency is closely related to subjectivity, and in the context of sport, this subjectivity is interpreted through racial and gendered identities (see also Carrington 2002; Messner 1997; van Sterkenburg & Knoppers 2004).

The circulation of notions of sporting ability attributed to race and gender are particularly influential in shaping ideas about what young people think is possible, especially their decision to pursue a career in professional sport (Messner 1989). This is an important but currently ignored factor in theorisations of African football migration. Sporting contests are both racialized and gendered, which influences understandings of embodied sporting practices, and in particular notions of sporting ability which are attributed to race and gender (Carrington 2002; St Louis 2004). Arguments placing nature and not nurture at the centre of sporting success have been refuted as a form of racist thinking (St Louis 2004). Nevertheless, the notion that black West African males are genetically predestined to excel in football has gained credence (Alegi 2010; Back et al. 2001; Entine 2001; Parker 2001; Scherrens 2007). This thinking, which is a form of palatable racism, is considered a key reason why West Africa has become the primary target of non African football clubs, as evidenced in the concentration of scouting networks in this region (Darby et al. 2007). However, at present the racial and gendered signification of sport is often framed within the paradigm of social constructionism, which while disrupting notions of biological essence also

evades the issue of materiality and perceptions of race and gender as being embodied through sporting performance. To overcome this problem, I conceptualise race and gender as spatially embodied practices, by considering both their discursive and material components (see Connell 2005; Slocum 2008; Saldanha 2006) within the process of African football migration.

In bringing together these insights from the four relevant but unexplored literatures mentioned above, I argue that dominant accounts of African football migration fail to see that at a 'vital conjuncture', young African males draw on their own racialized and gendered understandings, and attempt to utilise their 'bodily capital' to become 'entrepreneurs of self' within the football industry. Young African males are willing to 'try their luck' and migrate through football because this is now seen as a realistic means to attain development as freedom through spatial mobility, and therefore overcome the uncertainty and constraints on life ambitions facing them in Africa. These findings have significant implications for policy makers, as anti-trafficking campaigns and football migration policies that seek to curb football migration by regulating clubs and increasing awareness, are inadequate and misdirected.

I argue that analysts, FIFA, CFS and other stakeholders fetishize the act of unveiling the hidden content of African football migration, in both its regular and irregular form e.g. by trying to expose fraudulent football agents, the recruitment of minors by European clubs, 'the culture of mediocrity', neocolonial relations etc. Consequently, movement and football become the key issues. Therefore beyond the context of *football* migration, young African migrants become better off at home. Yet this position is in direct conflict with the subjectivities of these migrants. So how is this disjuncture possible? I use academic critiques of 'unveiling the commodity fetish' to argue that the disjuncture between policy and migrant subjectivities is linked to the structural logic of the approaches used to understand African football migration. These approaches bind subjects together by misrecognising the wider socio-historical context that underpins their migration. Migrant agency and broader contexts are hidden by the focus on the exploited African footballer, thus obfuscating migrant subjectivity and allowing football migration to be viewed in isolation from broader social relationships and processes.

1.3 Research Aims

In seeking to provide an alternate theorisation to the structural historical theories that currently dominate the literature on African football migration, it is important to clarify that this study does not seek to provide an undercover exposé on the football industry, which is neither viable nor particularly conducive to shedding light on the subject. Instead, I aim to use an analysis of migration through football to make an original contribution to broader debates in migration studies, and to further understandings of mobile African male bodies in migration and trafficking discourses. I take the particular case of male African youth in Accra (Ghana), and explore how and why they are drawn into the football industry, and follow the trajectory of African players to Europe, explicitly Paris (France). I do so by undertaking a ‘critical ethnography of migration’ (Lawson 2000), a methodological approach that enables the study to critically examine the temporal and spatially specific meanings that are tied to complex notions of identity and subjectivity in the context of football related migration. This ‘critical ethnography of migration’ is based on multi-sited ethnography at three Ghanaian football clubs, interviews with industry experts, and detailed accounts of the migration process from the perspective of migrants residing in Paris with first hand experience of football trafficking.

I use this ‘critical ethnography of migration’ to reframe football migration by asking the following questions:

- ❖ What happens if we move beyond structural historical theories and incorporate the subjectivities of African males?
 - Why are male West African youth disposed to prioritizing a career in professional football?
 - What role do constructions of race and masculinity play in the decision to pursue a career in professional football?
 - Is there a relationship between knowledge concerning football related trafficking and the decision to migrate through football?

- ❖ What happens when we view African football migration from West Africa itself, and specifically from Ghana?
 - How do local institutional practices in Ghanaian football interact with dominant representations and practices?
 - How does irregular migration emerge from the Ghanaian footballing milieu?

1.4 Thesis Outline

This thesis is composed of eight chapters, inclusive of this introduction. In Chapter 2 I critically assess the dominant discourses currently used to explain the migration of African football players. I create an alternative analytical framework using four non-football related literatures, namely: the meaning of commodities; migrant subjectivity and agency; young people in the Global South; and the racial and gendered signification of sport. I show how theoretical insights from these four literatures enable a better understanding of African football migration. They do so by highlighting the importance of migrant agency, subjectivity and the social context from which migration takes place. In Chapter 3 I provide an account of the research methods and strategies used in this study, and the data collection process while undertaking fieldwork in Accra (Ghana) and Paris (France). I justify why a 'critical ethnography of migration' allows this study to address limitations in the structural historical theories currently used to understand African football migration.

In Chapter 4, the first of four empirical discussion chapters, I frame current migration dynamics in Ghanaian football in relation to the past. I note how the football industry has long been associated with spatial mobility, however this intensified following the promotion of neoliberalism in the form of SAP's. I show how Ghanaian football is currently in an era of 'financialization', with youth players and their registration cards at the centre of speculative practices. Significantly, 'financialization' makes the movement of players both domestically and internationally a useful, and in some cases necessary feature of club football in contemporary Ghana.

In Chapter 5, I show how male youth in Accra claim that the spiralling cost of privatised education led them to 'drop out' out of school, and that the decision to pursue a career in professional football is the outcome of their socioeconomic situation. I argue that there is more to this situation than the cost of education. In fact the appeal of a career in professional football resides in its ability to provide a means to circumvent an education system they associate with unemployment, or unsatisfactory employment. In a post SAP neoliberal social context bereft of state welfare provision, the perception that football offers a means to generate an income and be self-sufficient is very appealing. Importantly, for these male youth, the spatially mobile West African professional football player is now considered emblematic of a successful life.

In Chapter 6, I demonstrate how in contrast to the pre SAP era, Ghanaian footballers are now keen to leave and ply their trade abroad. This

situation is often attributed to the ‘culture of mediocrity’ alleged to permeate Ghanaian, and West African football more generally. Unfortunately, increased competition from other would be professionals, and the duplicitous acts of opportunistic fraudsters, mean that gaining the opportunity to migrate is easier said than done. Young prospective footballers overcome this dilemma by engaging with the spiritual realm and scientific training methods, the latter being connected to notions of race and gender as spatially embodied practices. Problematically, ‘trying your luck’ does not remove the presence of opportunistic fraudsters, nor does it eliminate the existence of exploitative travel conditions and irregular migration.

The experience of irregular migration is discussed further in Chapter 7. I use findings from Accra and Paris to argue that the young people I encountered have lost faith in notions of temporal societal development, and they now see development as freedom through spatial mobility. I highlight how globalization has not brought modernity in the form of ‘first world’ living standards to these young people, it has merely brought an awareness of them. Problematically, this is coupled with an awareness that their desired spatial mobility is difficult to attain. Crucially, football is now considered a realistic means to obtain spatial mobility. In Chapter 8 I provide an overview of the thesis, and highlight key findings from chapters 2-7. I conclude by conceptualising how it is possible for analysts to systematically overlook the agency and subjectivities of African football migrants, and the wider social context underpinning their migration.

2.0 Literature Review



Fig 1: Cover of Vanity Fair July 2010

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of debates concerning the migration of African football players. I argue that while explanations founded upon historical structural theories have proven useful in providing a general framework to explain this form of migration, they frequently overlook the subjectivity and agency of the migrants involved. Furthermore, an over reliance on these frameworks has resulted in little academic attention being paid to the broader social context from which this type of migration originates. I offer an alternative analytical framework to understand African football migration that draws on insights from literatures on; the meaning of commodities; migrant subjectivity and agency; young people in the Global South; and the racial and gendered signification of sport. Incorporating theoretical insights from these texts provides a means to address limitations in how we currently understand the migration of African (particularly West African) football players, in both its regular and irregular form.

The chapter is structured around three key sections; the first critiques neo-colonial discourses as an explanation for the so-called muscle drain of African football talent. I introduce Poli's attempt to move away from these discourses using a Global Commodity Chain Framework, and the notion of the African footballer as a commodity. I show how authors theorising the meaning of commodities offer a means to overcome limitations Poli encountered. This literature also confirms the importance of acknowledging the interconnected nature of trade, cultural meanings and politics associated with the movement of commodities (which a footballer resembles), and the wider social contexts from which they originate. In the second section I critically assess irregular forms of football migration, commonly referred to as football trafficking, and situate these discussions within critical contemporary scholarship on migrant agency and youth in the Global South. In doing so, I shed light on the significance of remaining attentive to agency and the context underpinning the decision to migrate. In the third and final section, I introduce debates over race and gender. I show how in the context of sport, subjectivity is interpreted through racialized and gendered identities, and propose that this can help shed light on the migration of African football talent.

2.2 Moving beyond structural historical theories

The presence of African football players in European leagues often elicits little if any deeper reflection about migration from the majority of spectators (Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001). This is not the case in academia, where the migration of African football players, particularly to European clubs, has been the focus of a sizable body of research. A 2008 study by the Professional Football Players Observatory (PFPO), covering 456 top tier clubs in 30 UEFA member countries, recorded 531 players who were recruited in Africa and ‘moved with the ball’ (where migration is directly linked to legitimate recruitment by a foreign club) comprising 13.5% of non-European players, second only to Latin America with 25% (Poli 2010a). Table 1 below shows the origin countries of African football players in Europe, the majority of which are situated in the western part of the continent, with Nigeria, Cameroon, Côte d’Ivoire, Senegal and Ghana accounting for 62% of players who ‘moved with the ball’.

Table 1: ‘Country of origin of African players expatriated in Europe October 2008’ (source Poli 2010a, p.1006)

Country	Number of players	Percentage	Combined percentage
Nigeria	94	17.7	17.7
Cameroon	87	16.4	34.1
Côte d’Ivoire	59	11.1	45.2
Senegal	45	8.5	53.7
Ghana	44	8.3	62.0
South Africa	19	3.6	65.6
Morocco	18	3.5	69.0
Mali	18	3.4	72.4
Tunisia	16	3.0	75.0
Guinea	12	2.3	77.3
Burkina Faso	10	1.9	79.2
DR of Congo	10	1.9	81.1
Sierra Leone	10	1.9	83.0
Others	89	17.0	100.0
Total	531	100.00	

Consequently, when FIFA President Joseph Sepp Blatter publicly declared that European clubs recruiting African players were conducting themselves as, ‘neo-colonialists who don’t give a damn about heritage and culture, but engage in social and economic rape by robbing the developing world of its best players’ (Bradley 2003), he touched upon a subject of concern to FIFA, NGO’s, and academics alike. For while the majority of academic studies concerning the migration of African players to Europe have resisted resorting to hyperbole in their critiques, the underlying sentiments of Blatter’s comments are nonetheless widely considered valid (Darby 2007).

2.2.1 The muscle drain: A new scramble for Africa?

It is often argued that colonial legacies are responsible for the direction and patterns of football related migratory flows between Africa and Europe (Bale & Cronin 2003; Darby 2000; Darby 2007; Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001). This supposition is further strengthened by the fact that Belgium, England, France and Portugal rank among the prominent destinations of African football talent (Darby 2007; Darby et al. 2007; Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001). Commentators believe this results in a muscle drain² of African football talent (Andreff 2002; Darby 2007; cf Poli 2008). Yet alongside this alleged neocolonial pattern of migration, African players also move to a diverse range of countries with no formal colonial links, such as Greece, Malta, Turkey, Romania, Russia and Ukraine. Although research on the migration of African players to leagues beyond Europe is limited, and it is clear that there are few professional African footballers in the Americas and Oceania, Poli (2010) has highlighted a modest presence in Asia (see also Mukharji 2008).

In 2005, 12 footballers from six African countries (South Africa, Cameroon, Nigeria, Togo, Benin and Zimbabwe) played for Indian clubs. Poli also found ‘several dozen’ cases of African players in South-East Asia (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam). A high profile and contemporary example is the Chinese Super League, where ‘Shanghai Shenhua FC’ recently signed the Ivorian Didier Drogba, a move that

² The term is used to make an analogy with the ‘brain drain’, whereby highly skilled and educated people leave developing countries where it is argued they are more likely to make significant contributions to social development, and migrate to developed countries where they are more likely to have adequate resources and opportunities (Mullan 2007).

was followed by the arrival of five other African players to the league³ (Fottrell 2012). Conversely, in Cambodia the growing presence of West African players led the football federation to declare that the recruitment of foreign footballers would not be permitted from the 2008 season. The Persian Gulf has also emerged as a key destination for African football players, a subject I shall return to below.



Fig 2: Didier Drogba signs for a Chinese Super League club (Goal.com 2012)

The diversity in the destination of African football players suggests that the reduction of this migration to a form of neo-colonialism provides only a partial explanation, and potentially masks and/or distorts other factors. Thus while it would be unfair to dismiss the influence colonial legacies may play in the movement of African football talent, it is important to acknowledge the spatial and temporal nuances of this form of migration. For example, the man attributed with instigating a change in professional football's geopolitical landscape is João Havelange, FIFA president from 1974 to 1998. During his tenure countries in Africa and Asia were allocated more places at the World Cup Finals. The World Under 20 and Under 17 Championships were also introduced (Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001; Tiesler & Coelho 2007). It is argued that African players were placed in the 'shop

³Nigeria striker Yakubu Aiyegbeni departed English side Blackburn Rovers for Guangzhou R&F on a three-year deal. Mali's Frederic Kanoute left Spanish side Seville and signed a two-year contract with Beijing Guoan. Kanoute's compatriot Seydou Keita left Barcelona and signed a two-and-a-half-year deal with Dalian Aerbin (Fottrell 2012).

window' creating a demand for their services (Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001; Tiesler & Coelho 2007).

The introduction of new tournaments, and the provision of more places for African teams in existing tournaments did lead to the increased visibility of African players. Yet despite this new exposure, the number of African players recruited by European and Asian clubs increased more noticeably after 1995 following the introduction of the Bosman Law (Poli 2006). This stipulated that all players whose contracts had expired were free to sign for another club without paying any form of compensation to their previous club (Frick 2009; Magee & Sugden 2002). The passing of the Bosman ruling coincided with unprecedented cash profits for leading clubs, fuelled by the sale of broadcasting rights and UEFA Champions League prize money. This, coupled with revenue savings accrued from no longer compensating the former club of their new acquisitions, allowed teams to reinvest these savings in larger salary budgets to attract new players (Poli 2006). The financial chasm separating the best and lowest paid players, and the absence of a middle tier has culminated in what Jean Francois Bourg (1989) described as a dual labour market which he predicted would emerge if wages at the top were to rise dramatically. Beyond Europe, the situation is more critical, with numerous clubs in Africa, Asia and South America unable to pay their player's salaries (Cornelissen & Solberg 2007; Darby & Solberg 2010; Poli 2010a).

The case of Coton Sport Garoua, a multiple championship winning team in Cameroon and widely regarded as a well-managed club, exemplifies the situation of West African players who remain inside the continent. The top performers at the club currently earn less than €5,000 Euros per annum (Poli 2006), while their European counterparts can earn as much as €250,000 per week. The rise in top wages outside of Africa along with what some commentators have dubbed Africa's 'culture of mediocrity', entailing endemic corruption, inadequate sporting infrastructure and fragile political economy in relation to its European counterpart (Darby et al. 2007), are often cited as the key attractions of Europe to footballing migrants. This is argued to reinforce the importance of supply side dynamics in the player trade equation (Tiesler & Coelho 2007; Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001). By overcoming this 'culture of mediocrity', exploitative practices of clubs (particularly European) and agents will arguably cease, thus solving the *issue* of all forms of inter-continental African football migration. This appears to be a microcosm of the broader sedentary bias found in discourses on migration-

development, which propose that development in Africa will keep Africans 'in their place', namely within the continent's borders (see Bakewell 2008).

The concentration of Sub-Saharan African players within the lower tiers of European competition is often framed as an issue of overabundant labour supply within the continent, and in particular Western Africa, resulting from limited financial and playing opportunities. However, this neglects the demand for African talent by European and Asian clubs. Poli (2006) argues that in addition to their value on the field, the high concentration and demand for African players in the lower leagues is primarily because they allow recruiters to make significant savings through wage dumping, in effect reinforcing a segmented labour market. The recruitment of football talent from Africa to Europe⁴ is commonly theorised by means of dependency theory and the idea of 'dependent underdevelopment'. Influenced by Marxism, this approach views capitalism primarily as an exploitative system, but with class replacing nation states and regions as the focal point of analysis. Allen and Thomas (2000) argue that Northern industrialized nations used capitalism as a means to implement, and thus dictate the manner in which Southern economies would function. This permitted the North to devise and implement structures to prolong the dependence of the South in a system designed to maintain its underdevelopment, while allowing the North to prosper at its expense.

Theorists claim that dependency explains the appropriation of football talent from African to European clubs, as the latter have the superior economic clout to dictate football labour trading conditions. Moreover, the financial and political uncertainty surrounding the African football industry, particularly in Western Africa, exacerbates the inability of clubs to dissuade their best players from migrating to Europe in search of financial security. This situation is further complicated by the reliance on funds from player transfers to ensure the survival of African clubs, hence their supposedly dependent trading. Darby et al (2007) argue that this position involuntarily facilitates the deskilling and underdevelopment of African football on terms and conditions set by European interests. This Marxist inspired perspective has strong parallels with broader historical theorisations focused on the importance of an abundant 'labour supply', which argued that immigration became a structural necessity of post-World War II capital accumulation in Europe (see Samers 2004).

⁴ Migration to Asia is a new subject and has yet to be theorized

Dependency theory is also accompanied by a World Systems reading of African player migration to Europe. It is proposed that the movement of players, or 'muscle drain' is symptomatic of relations between periphery and core countries, and is indicative of the multifaceted domination of the latter over the former (Armstrong & Giulianotti 2004; Bale & Cronin 2003; Magee & Sugden 2002; Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001). With regards to representational practices, one can note that both of these theoretical frameworks draw on an economy of abstract binary oppositions- developed/underdeveloped, core/periphery. As Doty (1996) notes, there is nothing natural about these divisions. Yet they remain in circulation as legitimate forms of categorizing regions and people. This can have implications for the production of regimes of truth or knowledge within the context of player migration. As noted by Poli (2008), authors adopting the world systems framework uncritically visualize the functioning of world geopolitics.

Through this oversimplified lens of binary oppositions the core is implicitly proactive and dominant, while the periphery is submissive and dominated. Thus power erroneously becomes associated with terrain, rather than a practice associated with actors. A central cause of the recourse to world systems/dependency frameworks is that very often the process of migration is understood from a European vantage point, or what is known as 'a receiving country bias' (De Haas 2010). Yet as Poli also observes, actors in both the global North and South 'play a crucial role in the well-oiled functioning of the football players international trade' (2008, p.5). This is exemplified in the growing number of football academies found in West Africa (discussed below), which often demonstrate the diversity of individuals involved in the migration of West African football players. The case of Gilbert Kadji, the heir to one of Cameroon's key breweries and founder of Kadji Sport Academy (KSA) in Douala, illustrates the importance of adopting a more nuanced perspective than that provided by world systems and dependency theory. Since its establishment more than forty players have been sold to European clubs, e.g. Samuel Eto'o, Eric Djemba-Djemba and Carlos Kameni. These sales were organized directly from Africa, and interestingly in some cases through coordination with members of the Cameroonian Diaspora in France. Members of the Diaspora take charge of the young players when they come to Europe for trials, and act as middlemen between the owner of the academy and the recruiting clubs (Poli 2008).

This subsection has shown that worlds systems and dependency theory fails to consider the social contexts from which migration emanates. It also fails to convey how the actions and subjectivity of a multitude of African

and non-African actors, ranging from clubs, and football associations to agents, players and recruiters influences migration (Poli 2008). This raises an interesting question; what happens when we view football migration from Africa itself? In the sub-section that follows, I discuss means of overcoming the limitations of historical structural theories by exploring alternate approaches to commodities.

2.2.2 A neocolonial commodity?

The focus on trade in the context of football migration is particularly important, as the economic organization of world football results in a scenario whereby players are not only a human resource for clubs, but also a source of capital. Football players attain distinctive valuations according to their performances and marketability. This financial value is virtual when the player is under contract, but becomes real when a player under contract is transferred/sold from one club to another (Poli 2005). Poli (2005) therefore proposed viewing the footballer player as a commodity, and he was not alone; Darby et al (2007) casts African football players as 'neocolonial commodities', and the term commodity is also used by Brackenridge (2010) and Donnelly and Petherick (2004) in the context of child labour rights within professional sports. However, referring to another human as a commodity may appear morally inappropriate. This is especially true for those of African descent, due to the continent's fraught historical association with slavery (a subject I will return to below). Yet the term seems fitting if we view a commodity in the most basic terms (for now), as *something* produced and offered for sale or exchange on the market (Watts 2009). If we adopt this definition and then view commodification/commoditization as the process by which previously non-saleable and non-exchangeable things become commodities (Castree 2003), when we consider the empirical functioning of the international football players' labour market, the supposition that players are commodified does not seem so incongruous.

A key reason commodities attract academic attention, is their transgressive nature, which allows social scientists to investigate the complexity and relationality of socio-spatial life, particularly conceptual dualisms (Castree 2004). For example, Castree notes that commodities are neither 'local' nor 'global' but both; neither 'economic' nor 'cultural' (Castree 2004, p.22). The commodity chain emerged as part of theoretical attempts to understand the relationality of socio-spatial life through commodities, and it has become an almost omnipresent metaphor for investigating the movement of a commodity between the sequential and connected phases of production,

distribution and consumption (Hughes 2000). The origin of the term commodity chain is widely attributed to the seminal work of Hopkins and Wallerstein (1977), who provided the now widely accepted definition of a commodity chain as ‘a network of labour and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity’ (1986 p.159). The commodity chain approach attempted to reconcile a concern for the spatial distribution of production-consumption processes of a chain, with the social and organizational configuration of the chain i.e. the relationships between agents at different nodes (Challies 2008).

Poli (2005) attempted to facilitate a move away from dependency and world system frameworks, by expanding on the notion of the football player as a commodity. He employed a Global Commodity Chain (GCC) approach to highlight the key institutional nodes and the path that a player migrating from West Africa to Europe typically follows (see Fig 3 below).

Nodal point within the chain ⁵

1. African Neighbourhood team
2. Semi-structured African Club
3. Structured African Club
4. Junior Sector of a European Club
5. Professional European Club
6. Top European Club

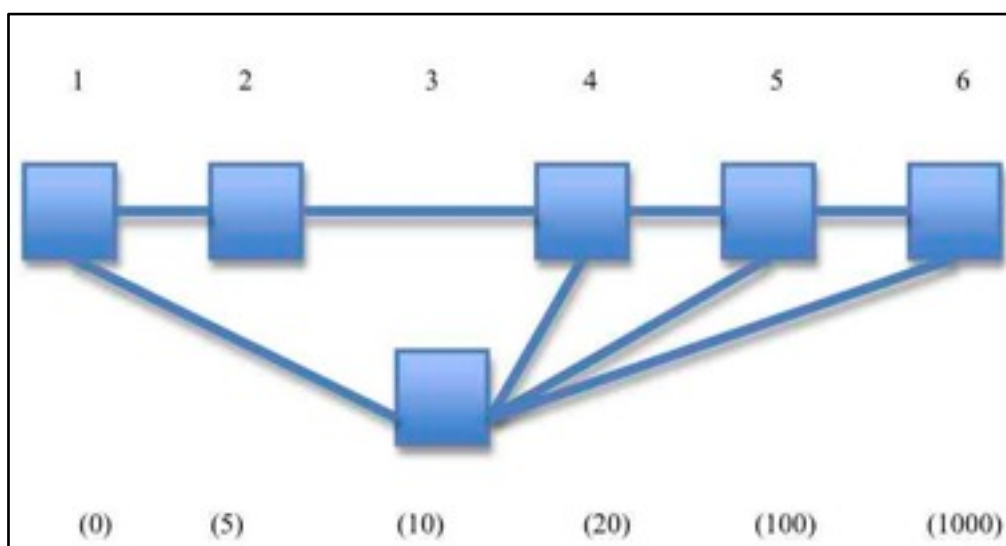


Fig 3: ‘Linear-ideal- typical input-output structure’ (Poli 2005, p.5)

⁵ The values within the brackets indicate that players are more valuable the further along the chain they progress

A key finding from Poli's research was that African players are often integrated into international transfer networks at an early age, and transferred abroad before having played for a professional domestic club. The reason being that the financial return for the selling club or football agent is greater the further one moves along the chain. Once a player reaches the fourth node his performances can enable him to acquire a significant value, particularly in comparison to the first two nodes. Problematically, Poli found that the GCC framework reduced the process to 'an exclusive economic, mechanic and linear process of a value-added input and output chain', which ignores non-economic factors (Poli 2005, p.6). Furthermore, he was also keen to stress that a key peculiarity of a footballer in relation to other commodities is their humanity. Thus he asks researchers to find another term, one that is better able to inscribe this human dimension and avoids semantic misunderstandings.

Poli's observation that his framework ignored non-economic factors is particularly significant, as I would also argue that literature on the migration of African football players does not fully explore the mechanism by which economic exchange generates value, and how this value becomes embodied in commodities (football players) that are exchanged (Appadurai 2003). Appadurai (1994) proposes that by concentrating on the things that are exchanged, rather than the forms these exchanges take, it becomes possible to better understand that which creates the link between exchange and value. The link according to Appadurai is politics (1994, p.76), but his conception of politics places weight on cultural dynamics. The revived interest in material culture, which Appadurai's work contributed to, also influenced the 'cultural turn' in geographical research. Thus of particular importance to the discussion here is the 'new geography of commodities' literature. The framing of this work as 'new' and different from earlier research on commodities, reflected the incorporation of a sensitivity to culture, a factor that was relatively neglected in previous accounts (Page 2005).

The field has already been surveyed extensively (see Bridge and Smith 2003, Castree 2004; Hughes and Reimer 2004; Jackson 2002) and reviewing this literature in its entirety is beyond the scope of this chapter. A snapshot of topics covered highlights a diversity of interests, such as; the Kenyan cut flower industry and ethical trade (Hughes 2000; Hughes 2001; Hughes 2005), transnationalism and south Asian food and fashion (Crang et al. 2003), exotic food consumption (Cook et al. 2004), water politics (Page 2005), the sociology of branded commodities (Pike 2009), and the internet (Miller 2003). Given the diversity of topics and interests, the 'new geography

of commodities' does not constitute a coherent approach built around a shared political or theoretical project. Instead it is a diverse field linked by a common interest in the movement of items of trade, and their ability to shed light on social experiences (Page 2005). Four broad trends in geographical writing more broadly were also reflected in commodity chain research⁶ (Jackson et al. 2006). Thinking through these changes is beneficial to this study, as they offer possibilities to overcome the economic determinism Poli encountered.

The first of the four trends was the Global Commodity Chain (GCC) paradigm (Gereffi & Korzeniewicz 1994). The second trend was shaped by the consumption turn, which witnessed the emergence of a group of approaches, notably drawing on systems of provision that aimed to better capture the significance of consumption (see Fine and Leopold 1993). Thirdly, a cultural turn reflected increasing interest in the complex and varied meanings and narratives attached to the commodity itself. Finally a quality turn emerged, which was deemed to be indicative of increasing concern among consumers, producers and the state over the environmental and social sustainability of commodity chains (Hughes & Reimer 2004).

Two notable alternatives to the chain metaphor emerged in response to these trends; namely circuits and networks (Bair 2005). The commodity circuits perspective attempts to construct a deeper contextual understanding of the cultural meanings attributed to commodities, as they move through different phases of circulation within the chain (Cook & P. Crang 1996). It critiqued the intricate forms of custom that dictate how commodities are moved between sites, and how cultural knowledge informs, and is informed by this process of movement rather than focusing upon beginning and end points in a chain (Hartwick 1998; Hughes 2000; Hughes & Reimer 2004; Jackson et al. 2006; Leslie & Reimer 1999; Skov 2005). In addition to acknowledging spatial specificity and enhancing the cultural dimension within commodity chain analyses, circuits of culture approaches challenged the systemic linearity inherent among certain traditional commodity chain analyses (Castree 2003). A concern shared by myself and others, however, is that the concept of a continuous circuit of commodity culture, could potentially lead to the loss of a key component of the commodity chain approach, the foregrounding of exploitative practices during the different phases of circulation (Hughes 2000; Leslie & Reimer 1999). This is not to

⁶ Detailed and exhaustive reviews have also been produced by others (see Bair 2005; Bair 2008; Challies 2008; Dicken et al. 2001; Gereffi & Korzeniewicz 1994; Hartwick 1998; Hughes & Reimer 2004; Leslie & Reimer 1999).

imply that the circuits of culture approach need be apolitical. When using aspects of the concept, a practitioner (such as myself) could be adaptive, and seek to locate points of power within the process.

The network metaphor is used to broadly convey the organization of social and cultural ties in economic linkages, and at its most general level the concept of a network can be used to capture the 'webs of interdependence existing between different sets of actors' (Hughes 2000, p.178). This allows for the connection and recognition of actors whose practices shape the circulation of a particular commodity, while avoiding the pitfalls of unidirectional linearity inherent within commodity chain approaches. Critics have argued that the 'indiscriminate proliferation of the network concept threatens to relegate it to the status of an evocative metaphor, applied so loosely that it ceases to mean anything' (Meagher 2005, p.218), yet its application to studies of commodities is more concise and limited. The network metaphor covers a multifaceted and often theoretically dense terrain, but can broadly be defined as depicting how different actors or nodes (people, organizations, firms, regions, states etc) are connected to each other, often in convoluted ways (Dicken et al. 2001; Hughes 2000; Hughes 2001; Korzeniewicz 1992; Thrift & Olds 1996).

Drawing upon the literature of Bruno Latour and John Law, theorists such as Whatmore and Thorne (1997) have highlighted the potential salience of actor-network theory (ANT) to the commodity chain approach. ANT calls for the multiplicity of actants to be enlarged (to include for example, animals, plants and inanimate objects), allowing methods by which nodes in the network are interconnected to become numerous and multidirectional, while remaining susceptible to renegotiation, contestation and differential interpretation (Latham 2002; Latour 2005). The aim is to understand how associations between different actants are made then unmade, and how these moments assemble and maintain what we refer to as society (Latour 2005). However, a key criticism of ANT is its depoliticizing and dehistoricizing tendencies, which can downplay power relations and the structuring effects of categories such as race and gender (Bingham 2009).

The 'new geography of commodities' argues that the process of constructing concepts about commodities is inherently political (Castree 2001; Page 2005), and researchers often attempt to politicize the human stories involved in the production, movement and consumption of commodities (for example Coulson 2004; Crewe et al. 2004; Hughes 2001; Hughes & Reimer 2004). Despite this stance, like ANT the charge of depoliticizing tendencies has also been leveled at the 'new geography of

commodities', which is claimed to lack the political traction of earlier commodity analyses. This earlier analysis was influenced by Marxist theory and often sought to 'unveil the commodity fetish', as part of an intellectual project to make visible the hidden injustices of commodity production by locating the appropriation of labour. The commodity fetish seeks to make known that which the commodity hides, and it sees the process of uncovering the content of the commodity as the final goal of analysis (Page 2005). However, theorists aligned with 'new geographies of commodities', such as Jackson (1999), argue that geographical metaphors e.g. distance and displacement, offered a more constructive way of engaging with contemporary commodity cultures than visual metaphors (such as unveiling, uncovering or unmasking) commonly associated with Marxist inspired commodity analysis. Jackson proposed that the concept of 'distance' provided a counter interpretation to critiques depicting consumers in a 'more passive role vis-à-vis the (increasingly centralized and powerful) forces and relations of production' (Jackson 1999, p.98).

Influenced by Zizek, Page (2005) discusses how Marx was not merely aiming to 'unveil' the hidden content of the commodity. The secret of the commodity that he sought to understand was not labour time itself, but the way in which labour time is subconsciously drawn into the mystery of commodity exchange through abstraction. This disguises labour time by giving it the form of a commodity. The abstraction that takes place during commodity exchange binds subjects together by knowingly misrecognising the wider social network that underpins market exchange. The ruse of the commodity fetish therefore resides in its ability to deceive the critic into believing that by unveiling the mystery of the commodity's content, an appropriate political programme can be identified and implemented e.g. fair trade or ethical trade. I say ruse, because as Page also highlights, in comparison to earlier readings of consumer ideology and the commodity fetish that rested upon the assumption that subaltern subjects were unaware of the consequences of their actions, contemporary readings of consumer ideology now suggest that in this information age subjects are often made aware of these consequences. Yet this knowledge does not necessarily alter their behaviour. Page suggests that transformative political change often fails to take place as unveiling the hidden content of a commodity merely reifies the social relations behind the commodity form.

The structural historical theories currently used to understand African football migration share a similar logic to the academic practice of 'unveiling the commodity' fetish. The difference being that while Marxist inspired

commodity analysis sought to uncover the hidden content of the commodity itself, theorists of African football migration seek to uncover the hidden content of the international football industry, which is seen as holding the key to addressing exploitative practices and unequal trading positions. Critics attempt to unveil the hidden content of the migratory process, by for example, focusing on neo-colonial relations between periphery and core countries and highlighting the alleged shortcomings of the African football political economy. In this case, theorization abstracts the footballers themselves from the wider social context that produces migration. Yet I have shown through my discussion on the reshaping of commodity chain analysis that this does not have to be the case.

The ruse of structural historical theories appears to reside in their ability to deceive the critic into believing that unveiling the mystery of migration by focusing on the football political economy, an appropriate political programme can be identified and implemented. I believe this is problematic, because it reifies the football political economy and fails to acknowledge something that Poli and myself have observed, that the commodity being traded in this case is unique, in that it is a human being. Therefore just as Marxist inspired theorists concerned with commodity analysis often fail to go on to understand that there is something particular about the category of objects known as commodities (Page 2005), certain theorists of African football migration fail to understand that there is something special about the 'raw materials' and 'neocolonial commodities' involved in sport. The political-economic structures that theorists of African football migration attempt to uncover by talking about neo-colonial exploitation do indeed influence migration. Yet, the human dimension means that footballers' own subjective representations and the wider social context must be taken into account, because they also influence how these migrants react to, conserve, or transform these very structures as part of a dialectic relationship between structure and agency.

I began this sub-section by highlighting Poli's admission that his attempt to deploy a GCC analysis to the migration of African players was unable to incorporate non-economic factors. Therefore while this offered a step towards a more nuanced understanding of the migration process than presented by dependency and world systems theory, it was still unable to provide an analytical framework for African football migration that was both economic and cultural. It was also unable to engage with the wider social context in which African football migration originates. To overcome this issue I showed how alongside and related to literature on commodity chains,

circuits and networks there is a body of research termed ‘the new geography of commodities’. The utility of this literature to the subject of African football migration is that it seeks to bring out the interconnected nature of trade, cultural meanings and politics associated with the movement of goods, and the wider social contexts from which they originate. In the next section I turn to debates over football trafficking, and draw on insights from critical contemporary scholarship on irregular migration more generally, and geographies of young people in the Global South. I do so because this literature is attentive to notions of migrant subjectivity and agency, which are neglected in the existing literature on African football migration

2.3 From the plantation to Vanity Fair

A footballer player migrating from West Africa to Europe typically passes through a football academy (see Fig 3 above). Football academies, broadly defined as ‘facilities or coaching programs designed to produce football talent, have long been a feature of the landscape of African football’ (Darby et al. 2007, p.148), and are a staple of both amateur and professional clubs. A study undertaken by Darby et al (2007, p.149) categorized African football academies into a fourfold typology.

1. Academies organized and run by African club sides or African national federations, which operate, on the surface at least, in a manner similar to those that exist in other parts of the world.
2. Afro-European academies, which involve either a partnership between an existing academy and a European club, or an arrangement whereby a European club takes a controlling interest in an African club and then either subsumes the club’s existing youth structures or establishes new ones.
3. Private or corporate-sponsored academies, which have well-established foundations and operate with the support and sponsorship of private individuals, usually former high-profile African players, national football federations, or the corporate sector.
4. Non-affiliated, improvised academies, which are set up on an ad hoc basis and involve unqualified staff and lack proper facilities.

Research has found football academies to be more fluid than this typology suggests, i.e. at various stages of their existence, they may fit one or more of the categories outlined above, which are not exclusive to a specific

country, and within nations with a reputation as a key exporter of football talent each form of academy can be found (Darby et al. 2007). CAF and FIFA fear the academy system provides European clubs and organized speculators with a mechanism to circumvent transfer regulations, such as the ban on the international transfer of minors (under 18s)⁷, and continue their procurement for a nominal financial outlay (Bale 2004; Bale & Cronin 2003; Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001; Magee & Sugden 2002). Moreover, drawing on parallels with slavery, these academies have also been referred to as ‘Soccer Plantations’ (Lindberg 2006). Importantly as noted by Poli (2010), these scouting networks should not only be linked to European clubs, as the Persian Gulf countries (among others) are now key recruiters of African football players. For example, the Aspire Academy of Qatar created the project ‘Africa Football Dreams’, which consists of a talent-scouting network covering ten African countries, namely; Cameroon, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, Kenya, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda and Tanzania. Since 2007, around 715,000 under 14-year-olds have taken part in trials through this project, but only twelve players per year are selected to attend the main academy in Qatar (Poli 2010).

2.3.1 Human Trafficking: Football’s dirty secret?

The recruitment of players at a young age and the consequences for those who are unsuccessful in their quest for a contract with a foreign club has become the subject of scathing criticism from football administrators, sections of the liberal European media, and human rights activists (Darby et al. 2007). Heather Kerr, *Save The Children’s* Côte d’Ivoire country manager, notes how parents often take their children out of school and entrust them to coaches and football agents working within or linked to an academy. ‘They pay the agent a fee for their enrollment and passage abroad, in the hope that they will ‘make it’ (Kerr cited in McDougall 2008). In the mid 1990’s Paul Carlier founded a pressure group called Sport and Freedom, and began campaigning on behalf of young African players often under eighteen years of age, who had been brought to Belgium by clubs and agents for trials and abandoned if unsuccessful (Darby et al. 2007; Donnelly & Petherick 2004). Sport and Freedom publicized how many of the players who were unsuccessful in securing football contracts often remained as illegal immigrants on the streets of Belgium, and that in some cases they turned to child prostitution as a

⁷ Article 19 of the 2009 FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players (RSTP), which was first introduced as Article 12(a) of the 2001 FIFA RSTP

means of survival (Donnelly & Petherick 2004). The situation in Belgium is argued to have improved following the passing of legislation in 1999, which restricted the ability to recruit foreign minors in sport. Yet, the association between the football industry and child exploitation has continued to characterize the migration of African football players (Darby et al. 2007).

The extent of concern is perhaps best exemplified by the response from the UNHCR. In 1999 they called for a thorough investigation into the practice of football agents purchasing young African players in order to sell them to European clubs. The UNHCR report, published in 1999, concluded by making reference to the 'danger of effectively creating a modern day 'slave trade' in young African footballers' (cited in Bale 2004, p.240). This report was followed by a 2009 European White Paper, which drew similar conclusions, and in recent years concern regarding this issue referred to as 'moving without the ball'⁸, has captivated academic, political and media interest (Bennhold 2006; Guest 2009; Letsch 2011; McCauley 2012; McDougall 2008; McDougall 2010; Scherrens 2007). Another example from Belgium is that of the 442 cases of 'African soccer slaves', uncovered by the senator Jean Marie Dedecker in 2005, when he exposed the illegal trade in Nigerian players (Lindberg 2006). Dedecker found that in addition to the 30 FIFA recognized football agents working within Belgium, there were approximately 170 'maverick agents' also trading players (Lindberg 2006).

The organization CFS and other commentators assert that in many of these cases, between €3000 to €4000 (Euros) are paid to football agents who claim to have obtained secure playing contracts for the player (Sparre 2007a). In some extremely rare instances, players do indeed have contracts in place albeit of an exploitative nature, which is known as human trafficking in football (Poli 2010b). Jean Marie Dedecker described how this takes place in the Belgian context.

When they sell them to the clubs, they make double contracts. They make an official contract because the contract must be shown to the Belgian Football Federation. And there is a second contract made with the boys. The only thing they get in Belgium as minors is food and lodging (ibid cited in Lindberg 2006, p.3)

⁸ Players based outside their country of origin whose migration is not directly linked to legitimized recruitment operated by a foreign club. The converse is 'moving with the ball' where a migration is directly linked to legitimized recruitment by a foreign club.

However, in most cases the alleged interest from a club is a charade, and this is known as human trafficking through football (Poli 2010b). Although depicting two different scenarios, both forms of irregular migration are often conflated under the umbrella term football trafficking. In both cases, the youth involved (sometimes as young as 11 years old) often remain in Europe in precarious circumstances without any means of subsistence (Haynes 2008; McDougall 2008; McDougall 2010; Sparre 2007b). This disinclination to return is often attributed to the shame they believe their situation will bring to their local community, particularly as extended family members often fund their trip (Haynes 2008; McDougall 2008; McDougall 2010; Rawlinson 2009).

As discussed above, the prevalence of African football players migrating to Europe has given rise to discourses explaining this process in terms of exploitative neo-colonial relations, and a muscle drain of African football talent, inducing impoverishment and underdevelopment of the African source countries. As noted by Poli (2010b), the limited academic work on football trafficking has emerged from these discourses, and is sometimes likened to a modern day slave trade (see Bale 2004). The agency of the players themselves is subsumed within these discourses (Poli 2010b), and colonial linkages only provide a partial explanation, as evidenced in the 442 cases of *Nigerian* 'soccer slaves' found in Belgium. This association between trafficking and slavery is not unique to football, as noted by Salt (2000). Ruggiero (1997) also compared notions of human trafficking with the historical concept of slavery (see also Bales 2004; Bales 2006; Bales & Soodalter 2010). I concur with Anderson (2008) that reference to slavery in the context of trafficking often leads to the eradication of migrant agency in the rush to 'help' vulnerable victims. This brings us to the subject of how, if at all, football trafficking relates to the broader literature on trafficking and other forms of irregular migration.

2.3.2 Grasping slippery definitions: Theorizing irregular migration

There appears to have been a renaissance both within, and outside academia concerning contemporary interest in the act of human trafficking. At present the common reference point for definitional purposes is the UN Protocol to 'Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, *Especially Women and Children*' (emphasis added), which was designed to complement the 2000 UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (TOC). The protocol is primarily implemented via the UN 'Global Programme against Trafficking in

Human Beings' (GPAT), and provides the legal reference point for the international definition of human trafficking (Harsch 2001; Manzo 2005b; Stolz 2005; Tyldum & Brunovskis 2005). The UN convention against TOC also provides an accompanying protocol against the 'Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air', which includes a separate definition of smuggling⁹. UN GPAT cited in Aronowitz (2001, p.165) uses the following definitions:

- Smuggling of migrants shall mean the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefit, of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.
- Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.
- Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

Some readers may have expected me to provide definitions of these terms during the earlier discussion on football trafficking, however I intentionally chose not to do so as most authors provide no point of reference for their attribution of trafficking to the migratory practices taking place (Poli 2010b is a notable exception).

As Aronowitz (2001) amongst others has noted, although both smuggling and trafficking are irregular forms of migration, political debates and media coverage on illegal immigration frequently equate human trafficking with human smuggling using the terms interchangeably. Anderson (2007b) also observes how the existence of two protocols suggests that two

⁹ A detailed discussion of the legal technicalities of the trafficking and smuggling framework is beyond the scope of this study. For such a discussion, please see (Adepoju 2005; Aghatise 2004; Aronowitz 2001; Chuang 2006; Goodey 2003; Goodey 2008; Jonge van Ellemeet & Smit 2006; Stolz 2005; Willen 2007)

disparate groups of migrants exist, those who are trafficked and those who are smuggled. Thus at the most basic level, trafficking involves some form of exploitation, while conversely the main purpose of smuggling may simply be to facilitate the illegal crossing of borders (Salt 2000; Samers 2003). Given that commentators have acknowledged migrants' complicity in obtaining fraudulent travel documents to attend trials with clubs (Lindberg 2006; McDougall 2010), one cannot help but wonder as to why such behaviour is continuously framed as trafficking, when it also appears to fit the description of smuggling. Why is this considered a case of football trafficking? The confusion could be due to problems associated with definitions of trafficking in persons that the Palermo protocol does not resolve, more specifically the prospect that smuggling and trafficking practices and networks are in certain contexts indistinguishable (Anderson 2007a; Anderson & Andrijasevic 2008). Accordingly, there is a growing body of literature that calls for a more critical engagement with the content of the aforementioned protocols. It seeks to question not only what trafficking and smuggling are functional terms for, but also the ramifications of categorizing people as 'victims of trafficking' or 'victims of smuggling' (Skilbrei & Tveit 2008).

The definitions provided in the protocol were designed to help states, organizations and individuals differentiate between acts of trafficking and smuggling, to allow them to respond to those involved appropriately (Nieuwenhuys & Pecoud 2007). Yet there has been what Anderson and Ruhs describe as 'a resurgence of academic interest in moving away from the debates driven by policy or by civil society concerns, and towards theorising illegality, and (in particular) considering it as a phenomenon to be studied rather than as a problem to be solved' (2010, p.176). This literature seeks to retheorise borders, migrant agency, and the state, by shifting analysis away from viewing (irregular) migrants as objects or victims of migration regimes, and adopting migrant subjectivities as its starting point. This emerging body of research has highlighted several concerns with regards to the manner in which the 'victim' in trafficking discourses is explicitly gendered and aged, as women alongside children are clearly mentioned (Aghatise 2004; Andrijasevic 2007; Doezema 2005; Sharma 2003; Skilbrei & Tveit 2008). It is argued that this genders both Protocols by constructing trafficking as an act that happens to women, while smuggling becomes an act associated with men (Andrijasevic 2007; Ditmore & Wijers 2003; Skilbrei & Tveit 2008; Sullivan 2003).

As mentioned above, smuggling concerns the illegal entry of migrants, whereas trafficking regards not only the movement but also the accompanying coercion and exploitation of persons in a destination country (Nieuwenhuys & Pecoud 2007). Subsequently, trafficking discourses are argued to evoke women and children who are understood as innocent passive victims, the antithesis of criminals who are complicit in smuggling (Davidson 2005). When placed alongside the politicization of debates on trafficking for purposes of prostitution, female migrants become further associated with the perception they lack agency, as reflected in arguments that women cannot enter prostitution voluntarily (Anderson 2007a; Ditmore 2005; Doezema 2005; Skilbrei & Tveit 2008). This denial of agency is characteristic of a 'feminist abolitionist' stance on prostitution, which recognizes no distinction between 'forced' and 'free choice prostitution' (Anderson & Andrijasevic 2008; Doezema 2005). Thus those partaking in the sex industry are not smuggled into states, they must be trafficked, as no woman could sincerely consent to prostitution (Anderson 2007a). Related discussions concerning the issue of choice in the context of migration raise questions that are often hypothetical or philosophical in nature, for example; if a person were to undertake a clandestine journey because they believed they had no other choices, and were hampered by destitution, to what extent have they really consented as opposed to being 'forced' by poverty (Anderson 2007b; Doezema 2002).

Migrant agency is argued to be of fundamental importance when researching immigration, as migrants are increasingly understood to interact with policy, which is itself deemed reactive to migrant behaviour as well as to the broader political and economic climate (Anderson & Ruhs 2010; Hernández-Carretero 2009; Sharma 2005). Yet notions of agency tend to be oversimplified both in the media and at the policy level, often presented as being related to 'choice', particularly in debates about illegality and trafficking (Anderson & Ruhs 2010; Davidson 2006). This is partly because most explanatory frameworks are based on a view of international migration as; 'the relationship between on the one hand an individual or household moving for purposes of permanent settlement or work, and on the other a government acting as a gatekeeper for entry into a country and acquisition of its citizenship' (Salt 2000, p.35). Problematically, trafficking and smuggling disturb this understanding of migration by blurring the boundaries between forced and voluntary movements, and between legality and illegality. They question the degree of choice a migrant is able to exercise (Salt 2000), a topic addressed in the research of Koser (2008; 2010), Cvajner and Sciortino

(2010) and Sharma (2005). This and other related literature, has argued that migrant agency cannot be dissociated from the diverse contexts and life histories from which they emerge, and likewise illegality in this context cannot be examined in isolation from other processes and phenomena (Anderson & Ruhs 2010).

Skilbrei and Tveit (2008) have pointed to the fact that increased border control, sometimes to prevent trafficking, makes migrants more dependent on alternative forms of assistance, possibly increasing the likelihood of exploitation (see also Anderson et al. 2009; Demleitner 2001; Sharma 2005a). The introduction of ever more restrictive immigration policies and tighter border controls by migrant-receiving countries is argued to have led to the emergence of a growing market for clandestine migration services, including smuggling networks, fake travel documents, and arranged marriages (Anderson et al. 2009; Anderson & Ruhs 2010; Davidson 2011; Sharma 2005a; Skilbrei & Tveit 2008). Studies have found that the focus on illegality through acts such as trafficking and smuggling serves to divert attention from the rights of individuals (Skilbrei & Tveit 2008). By referring to those involved as victims of trafficking or slavery, it becomes a case of returning them to their country of origin. This negates the need for engagement with migrants' rights and limits state obligations towards them Davidson (2006).

Sharma (2003) and Bakewell (2007) argue that deeply embedded within anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling discourse and practices, which have played an increasingly prominent role in anti-trafficking/anti-smuggling policies during the last decade, are anti-immigration sentiments expressed in the idea that migrants are 'better off at home' and would prefer to be in their country of origin. Yet given the risks that migrants have been shown to take in order to reach destinations (Hernández-Carretero 2009), this is clearly not always the case. I would argue that there are parallels with the structural historical theories discussed above, where an implicit sedentary bias appeared to assume that African football players would prefer to remain at 'home'. The raises in an interesting question, would African football migrants really prefer to remain at home?

It is argued that anti-trafficking campaigns fail to take into account migrants' limited agency in the migration process. The framing of the issue in terms of slavery or trafficking assumes that the migrants involved are moved against their will, and thus the trafficker becomes the instigator of their exploitation (Sharma 2003). This can lead to origin countries appearing as locations where a person cannot be harmed or socially disadvantaged

(Anderson 2007b; Sharma 2003; Sharma 2005b). Sharma (2005b) argues that by ignoring the reasons why people embark on clandestine journeys, and adopting a 'get tough on traffickers and/or smugglers' approach has two outcomes. Firstly, it functions as an ideological means to confuse how economic, political or social forces are often a factor in people's displacement. These forces are often embedded within the complex interactions of transnational corporations, national states, and international bodies (Samers 2003). Secondly, the reality that aside from profit-making smuggling rings, there are few options for people to migrate legally is ignored. This is linked to the immigration policies of popular destination countries in the West, where states are imposing ever more restrictive immigration policies at a historical juncture when migration has become an increasingly important strategy for accessing employment opportunities and life resources (Anderson et al. 2009; Samers 2004).

There are significant similarities between the discourses concerning football trafficking, trafficking more generally, and the structural historical theories currently used to theorize regular African football migration. In the previous section I used research from the 'new geographies of commodities' to show that a flaw in structural historical theories is their focus on the football political economy and the act of migration rather than migrants themselves. I argued that this was problematic, as it reifies the football political economy and fails to acknowledge the agency and subjective representation of players. As shown in the review of debates over irregularity, the agency of people involved in irregular forms of migration is also placed in the periphery. Furthermore, the emphasis on the act of irregular migration serves to conceal how economic, political or social forces are often a factor in people's displacement. By doing so, like the structural historical theories used to understand African football migration, this perspective on irregularity fails to consider the wider context behind the decision to migrate, and fails to appreciate that migration is a popular strategy for accessing employment opportunities and life resources.

The topic of agency is also central to contemporary research on young people in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Global South more broadly. However, while academic literature and media reports often associate football migration in both its regular and irregular form with children and youth in their early to mid twenties (Darby et al. 2007; McDougall 2010; Letsch 2011; McDougall 2008; Rawlinson 2009), these two literatures have not been brought together. I argue that debates over young people in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Global South more generally, are particularly relevant to discussions concerning the

migration of African football players. This literature is sensitive to notions of subjectivity and agency, and has found that children and youth often experience broader social forces as a set of foreclosed opportunities for mobility (Jeffrey 2010). I will now provide an overview of work concerning the agency and migratory practices of young people in Sub Saharan Africa.

2.3.3 Don't stop moving: Young People in Sub Saharan Africa

In their study on employment in Ghana and the Gambia, Chant and Jones (2005) noted how young people residing in both the Global North and South have emerged as a relatively recent subject of academic enquiry. The authors suggest that this increasing prominence is both a contributory cause, and effect, of the growing consideration given to children and youth rights in major policy debates. This arose in the wake of the International Year of the Child in 1979, and the formulation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989 (Chant and Jones 2005). Thus, as also highlighted by Evans (2008), researchers have attempted to address concerns that this demographic was often absent in the social sciences and public policy discussions. The categories children, youth and young people are often used collectively or interchangeably both within and outside academic contexts. However within geographical research, 'children' generally refers to those aged 5–15, 'youth' to those aged 16–30, and 'young people' to children and youth collectively (Jeffrey 2010 cf Skelton 2009). Yet these categories are socio-temporally specific, as noted in relation to the Global North, (for example McDowell 2003; Nayak 2003; Skelton & Valentine 1998). This is also evident in Africa, where the heterogeneous nature of these categories often make them 'difficult to grasp and pin down analytically' (Langevang 2007).

The analytical uncertainty associated with these categories (children, youth, young people) is in many ways linked to a broader critique of their normativity. This is often part of a sustained critique of socialisation theories, particularly the teleological assumptions of life stage models such as the 'transition model'¹⁰, where childhood and youth are conceptualised as part of an assumed linear transition to adulthood- a progression from relative dependence to a condition of autonomous selfhood and independence (Holloway & Valentine 2000; Hopkins & Pain 2007; Jeffrey & McDowell 2004; Jeffrey 2010; Skelton 2009; Vanderbeck 2007). This occurs by passing through key events or rights of passage, such as; the movement from full-time

¹⁰ See Valentine (2003), for an exhaustive review of the geographical work on this subject

education to the workforce, from the dependency of living at home with parents to becoming independent, forming partnerships and becoming a parent oneself (Evans 2008). It is argued that the conflation of a successful adulthood with notions of independent choice, is the product of a socio-political endeavour, not a universal social datum (Jeffrey 2011), as in many parts of the world, particularly African countries, adulthood is associated with the forging of interdependencies rather than autonomy (Evans 2010; Langevang 2008; Langevang & Gough 2009; Langevang & Gough 2012; Simone 2005). People often become less rather than more independent as they age, and their responsibility for social reproduction does not decrease (Ansell 2005; Ansell & Van Blerk 2004; Evans 2010). Thus as highlighted by Valentine (2003) and McIlwaine and Datta (2004), for young people residing in both the Global North and Global South, the transition from childhood to adulthood is often 'partial, inconsistent and contradictory' (ibid 2004, p.485).

In the context of Sub Saharan Africa socio-economic conditions are increasingly rendering youth a permanent condition, as many young people are unable to acquire markers of social status associated with adulthood, as prescribed by teleological assumptions of life stage models (Vigh 2010). According to Porter et al (2010), Africa's urban youth are often represented both inside and outside the continent as 'forever in a state of becoming (yet never arriving)' (ibid 2010, p.796). Therefore the idea that young people make one transition to adulthood, and that adulthood is both a stable status and destination that one arrives at, is deemed a problematic premise (Jeffrey 2010; Langevang 2007; Vigh 2010). Importantly, geographical and anthropological research on young people in Africa has highlighted how youth transition as a theoretical tool should not be completely dismissed (Langevang 2007), as a transition to a socio-temporally specific conception of adulthood is often an ambition of many young people. Rather, if transitions are non-linear, it is proposed that it would be more productive to relocate attention from distinct life stages marked by specific events, to 'episodes or conjunctures of events that have implications for people's social relations, positions and life trajectories, but that do not necessarily move them neatly from one life stage to the next' (Langevang 2007, p.2040). This stance emphasises how young people in Africa and other parts of the world are not just in a state of becoming, but also active beings in the present (Langevang 2007; Porter et 2010; Vigh 2010). In his research on youth in Douala, Simone exemplified this situation as follows;

There is always much imagination and discussion of the future. But there is also a sense that everything has to be taken in now (Simone 2005, p.529)

Contemporary studies have documented how against a backdrop of uncertainty regarding issues such as; the privatisation of education (Rolleston & Okech 2008), unemployment (Chant & Jones 2005), health care (Evans 2010), conflict and political instability (Vigh 2006), young people in many parts of Africa do not just see youth as a stage they are passively passing through (see also Abebe 2008; Ansell & Van Blerk 2004; Gough 2008; Langevang 2007; Manzo 2005a; Porter et al. 2010; Simone 2005; Young & Barrett 2001). On the contrary, 'they are 'agentic' in achieving what they desire for their lives, they are forging new ways forward in socially and economically difficult circumstances' (Langevang 2007, p.269).

As noted by Jeffrey (2010), the suggestion that young people have agency 'has become a type of mantra within the social science', however a key finding emerging from this literature, is that the form and nature of this agency is multifaceted, often departing from open resistance (see Katz 2009). Instead of resistance, the agency of young people in Africa is often 'discovered' or 'performed' during specific durations in their biographies (Jeffrey 2011), for example dropping out of school (Ansell & Van Blerk 2004), or when confronting educated-unemployment (Waage 2006). This is also evident in studies that discuss resourcefulness and entrepreneurialism (Jeffrey 2011; Langevang et al. 2012). These insights are central to my later exposition of why young West African boys drop out of school and try their luck at forging futures through football instead. The literature draws attention to how the resourcefulness of young people often resides in their ability to not only survive, but also assume responsibility for social reproduction, amidst socio-economic insecurity and the restructuring of labour markets (Abebe 2008; Ansell 2005; Ansell & Van Blerk 2004; Chant & Jones 2005; Gough 2008; Langevang & Gough 2012; Porter et al. 2011; Waage 2006). Jeffrey (2011) suggests that three key analytical points about agency can be observed from these, and other contemporary studies of young people residing in both the Global North and South as summarized below;

1. Agency is increasingly understood in relation to multiple structures of dominance as opposed to with respect to a single form of oppression, for example with reference solely to capitalism. Research has found that in order to understand young peoples agency, it is important to ascertain the ways in which children and youth 'navigate plural,

intersecting structures of power, including, for example, neoliberal economic change, governmental disciplinary regimes, and global hierarchies of educational capital' (Jeffrey 2011, p.2).

2. 'The nature of agency and young people's capacity to act positively in relation to surrounding structures varies across space and time, and do not press down on people in an even way over time. Structures not only shift in their nature and intensity with the passing of time, they also become more or less salient at particular extended 'moments' in people's lives' (Jeffrey 2011, p.2).
3. 'A third recent initiative in studies of childhood and youth has been to reflect on what if anything might be distinctively interesting about young people's agency relative, for example, to the agency of older adults. On the one hand, the dismantling of the welfare state in many countries, restructuring of families, and extension of free-market economic measures have constrained the agency of young people in different sites. On the other hand, young people are becoming centrally involved in a range of disparate, and sometimes complexly linked, forms of action' (Jeffrey 2011, p.2).

These findings on the subject of young peoples agency correspond with and are influenced by research in sub-Saharan African, particularly studies that have identified migration as key factors in shaping experience and the ability to react to, engage with and overcome socio-temporal structures (Ansell & Van Blerk 2004; Gough 2008; Langevang & Gough 2009; Porter et al. 2010; Skelton 2009).

The significance of these findings to a study on African football migration, is that they confirm my concern that the failure of current theorizations to incorporate notions of agency and subjective representations leave them incapable of understanding the non-football related context from which the decision to, and thus manner in which, migration originates and takes place. The emphasis on the football political economy obscures this point. For example, in her research on the impact of HIV to household reproduction, Young (2004) found that children were often deemed integral to explanations for the migration and mobility of adults, with their requirements often determining and impacting a family or care givers ability to migrate. Children's independent movements were often absent from academic enquiry or subsumed within literature on family migration. Although limited, the conceptual developments as discussed above, which proclaim the agentic nature of children and youth, can be seen in studies

showing how young peoples migratory practices are situated within broader political, economic and social conditions, and may take place separately from the family unit (Ansell & Van Blerk 2004; Coe 2012; Gough 2008; Hansen 2008; Manzo 2005a; Skilbrei & Tveit 2008; Ungruhe 2010; Vigh 2009). It is argued that by drawing attention to the meanings young people ascribe to movement, and by analysing their movements, ‘the importance of spatial mobility to young people’s everyday well-being and their processes of social becoming are illustrated’ (Langevang & Gough 2009, p.741).

A key finding from this research has been that movement is often seen as emblematic of social status, and migration is inextricably linked to the attainment of social mobility (Ferguson 2006; Langevang & Gough 2009; Porter et al. 2010; Simone 2005; Young 2004). Several studies have observed an increasing perception amongst young people that obtaining social mobility while residing in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa is unlikely, combined with a sense that this situation is unlikely to change significantly in the foreseeable future. This has resulted in many young people associating immobility and a sedentary disposition as a path towards the stagnation of their personal development (Ferguson 2006; Jua 2003; Langevang & Gough 2009; Simone 2005). For example, as noted by Simone in his research on youth in Douala.

Instead of anticipating the development and transformation of lives within the city, the city is used as a platform to actualise some form of escape (Simone 2005, p.524)

These studies investigate how young people may, or may not be, socialized into a ‘culture of migration, or discourses about mobility, which contribute to the patterns and flows of people, including the movement of young people themselves’ (Coe 2012, p.913), in an attempt to understand the subjectivities of young people, both prior to and after migration (Coe 2012). Young people in sub-Saharan Africa (not exclusively), are found to conceptualize the world hierarchically, with geographical imaginations deployed to differentiate regions and countries by their potential to facilitate the accumulation of resources (Coe 2012; Coe 2011; Ferguson 2006; Jua 2003; Langevang & Gough 2009; Nyamnjoh & Page 2002). Importantly, although most migration takes places within the continent (Bakewell & De Haas 2007), this is seen by young African people as less beneficial than migration to the West, namely Europe and the US, which are commonly associated with modernity and associated discourses of development and progress (Jua 2003; Langevang & Gough 2009; Nyamnjoh & Page 2002). Migration to the West has become a ‘metaphor for liberation’ providing a

possible 'entrance to adulthood' (Jua 2003, p.23), a belief circulated and reaffirmed by the accomplishments and practices of return migrants and the media (Langevang & Gough 2009). As noted by Ferguson;

Modernity, in this historically specific conjuncture, appears not (as it does to many contemporary anthropologists) as a set of wonderfully diverse and creative cultural practices, but as a global status, and a political-economic condition: the condition of being 'first class'. Some people and places have it, others don't (emphasis in original Ferguson 2006, p.187).

The 'accelerated closure of the West' (Jua 2003) in the form of tightened immigration rules, has however made it increasingly difficult for young people in sub-Saharan Africa to acquire travel documentation via official channels, and engage in the migratory practices they desire (Jua 2003; Langevang 2008). Thus a discrepancy arises between young people's positive valuations of mobility and their actual capacity to migrate, with restrictions on their desired movements deemed as obstacles blocking their 'social becoming' (Langevang & Gough 2009). This has led to the emergence of unofficial visa industries, travel agents and facilitators that assist potential migrants in forging documents and the planning of illegal routes to Europe and beyond (Langevang 2008; Skilbrei & Tveit 2008). Young people in sub-Saharan Africa are often willing to embark on dangerous journeys to overcome barriers to their mobility (Hernández-Carretero 2009). However as shown in this section, it is only possible to understand why this is the case by considering the background to young peoples' movements, and situating their subjectivities within a political, economic and social context.

The literature on young people in the Global South has provided a sophisticated understanding of agency and the social contexts from which migration takes place, while also highlighting the uncertainty and constraints on life ambitions facing young people residing in Africa. In the third and final section of this chapter, I argue that to better understand African football migration specifically, the desire for spatial mobility has to be cast within an understanding of concepts of race and gender. This is because the circulation of notions of sporting ability attributed to race and gender are particularly influential in shaping ideas about what young people think is possible, and their decision to pursue a career in professional football.



FIGURE 2 Cartoon from *West African Pilot*, July 23, 1949

Fig 4: Cartoon from *West African Pilot*, Nigeria, July 23, 1949¹¹
(Alegi 2010, p.38)

2.4 Matter over Mind: Race, gender and sport

So far I have referred primarily to the migration of African football players, yet this is somewhat imprecise, as not all the continent's countries have a strong reputation for exporting football players. As indicated above, the key exporters are in fact found in Western Africa, with Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal accounting for over 60% of migrations. It is claimed that due to their innate physical characteristics, black West African males are genetically predestined to excel in football (Alegi 2010; Back et al. 2001; Entine 2001; Parker 2001; Scherrens 2007). Natural ability is offered as the explanation for why they and not, North, East or South Africans have become the primary target of football clubs and talent scouts. This reputation is reaffirmed by the concentration of the majority of scouting networks and academies in this region (Darby et al. 2007). Following the Presidency of Joao Havelange, black West African males have become part of footballing hierarchy that places them at or very close to the top, as highlighted by the

¹¹ Caption reads- 'I have jobs for boys who can use not necessarily their brains, but their legs'

chapter title page image taken from the June 2010 cover of *Vanity Fair*¹². However, while reference has been made to how these supposedly innate attributes make West African males attractive to foreign clubs, the notion that these same beliefs may be a factor in their decision to pursue a career in football or to migrate is neglected.

Deeply held beliefs about gender and race have been asserted through the lens of sport for decades (Birrell 2003; Carrington & McDonald 2001; Grainger et al. 2006; Gruneau 1999; St Louis 2004), and at the turn of the 20th century notions of a white athletic superiority circulated openly (Bale & Cronin 2003; Harrison et al. 2004; Leonard 2007; Whannel 2002). Belief in innate white athletic superiority is no longer considered credible, and the dominant ideology of current thought is argued to have inverted itself in this regard (Azzarito & Harrison Jr 2008; Buffington 2005; Burfoot 1992; Entine 2001; Holden 2004). Using cultural, feminist and post-colonial perspectives, a body of literature has developed to explore, 'the racial signification of sport' (Carrington 1998). This literature proposes that sports act as key signifiers for broader issues within racially demarcated societies, through which narratives regarding the individual and wider society are read (Buffington 2005; Burdsey 2006; Carrington & McDonald 2001; Long & Hylton 2002; Messner et al. 2000). Although not categorized in the same way, this and other related literature also discuss what could be termed 'the gendered signification sport'.

In the discussion that follows, I frame the racial and gendered signification of sport within a review of contemporary literature on race and gender in geography and the social sciences. I do so because while arguments placing nature and not nurture at the centre of sporting success have been refuted as a form of racist thinking, the idea that black West African males are physically predestined to excel in sports such as football, a form of palatable racism, has gained credence (Alegi 2010; Back et al. 2001; Entine 2001; Parker 2001; Scherrens 2007). I argue that the racial and gendered signification of sport is an example of how subjective representations must be taken into account in order to understand football migration. A key theme in the discussion that follows is the discord within literatures on race and gender regarding the tension between materialist and socially constructed conceptualisations of both concepts.

¹² Although slightly off topic, it is perhaps relevant to highlight that following the publication of this magazine cover there were discussions within the British tabloids concerning the size or a lack thereof, of Didier Drogba's genitalia.

2.4.1 Race: On the streets but not on the page

Certain readers of this text may have noticed that the word race has not been placed within inverted commas and may be curious as to why, other readers may be wondering why it should be. Within contemporary academic theorisation, race i.e. the categorization of the human population according to markers of physical criteria, such as skin colour, nose shape, head shape, genital size and hair type is commonly considered to be a social construction¹³. Race is claimed to be a discursive category that refers to the cultural representation of people, rather than the actuality of the people themselves (Back & Solomos 2009; Bonnett 1996; Gilroy 1998; Gilroy 2000; Miles 2009). Race was once considered a natural hierarchical framework of difference among human beings (Winant 2006), however it is now widely accepted that racial categories are relatively recent spatial and temporally specific ideological constructions (Back & Solomos 2009; Gilroy 1998; Malik 1996; Miles 2009; Young 1995). The emergence of these categories is linked to European scientific thinking during the Enlightenment Period of the late 18th and early 19th century, pioneered by the work of Camper (1791), Cuvier (1805), Knox (1850) and Gobineau (1854) (Malik 1996; Snowden 1997; Bernasconi 2009; cf Isaac 2006)¹⁴.

Today most justifications of race rely on cultural as opposed to biological arguments, relying on the assertion that beliefs, values and practices of different ethnic communities are both distinctive and irreconcilable (Amin 2010). Changing approaches to the study of race within geography and the social sciences can be set within the context of changing political and discursive contexts (Dwyer & Bressey 2008), influenced by literature from fields such as culture, legal and urban studies. Bonnett (1996) observed three key paradigmatic shifts leading up to the new millennium; objectivism, race relations and the contemporary social constructionism. Social construction can broadly be understood as referring to the interrogation of the formation of socio-spatial meaning, as social constructionist theory rejects the longstanding view that attributed categories are natural¹⁵. This is achieved via identification of the components and

¹³ For a broader introductory overview please see Back and Solomos (2009) and for a geographically specific review see Tolia-Kelly (2010).

¹⁴ Isaac argues that race is not a modern invention and that it was present in ancient societies

¹⁵ Theorists such as Latour (2005) question the lack of critical analysis of the term social within academic theorisation, and this is a key criticism of social constructionism. Who or what is doing the constructing?

processes involved in the construction of notions of national, regional and other territorial and spatial identities, but also categories such as, feminine or white (Bonnett 1996). Thus, certain theorists such as Gilroy, Ware, Miles and Back place the word race within inverted commas ('race') to indicate both an awareness of the words dubious past, but also skepticism regarding its referent.

This results in a peculiar predicament for theorists of race. If, as is commonly agreed, the dominant paradigm within the discipline is social constructionism (Back & Solomos 2009; Bonnett & Nayak 2003; Dwyer & Bressey 2008; Jackson 1987; Nayak 2006) which concludes there is no such thing as race, how then does one tally such theoretical insights with; a) the persistence of what appears to be racially influenced social structures of inequality and exclusion; b) the continued practice of attributing ontological value to the concept potentially reifying its status (Bonnett & Nayak 2003; Dwyer & Bressey 2008; Nayak 2006; Saldanha 2006; Saldanha 2009; Slocum 2008). These and other issues such as the normative position of whiteness in discussions of race and ethnicity (Bonnett 1997; Bonnett 1998; Bonnett 2000; Nayak 1999; Nayak 2003; Nayak 2005; Nayak 2007; Tolia-Kelly 2010), have led to a sustained critique of geographical and wider understandings of race and the social constructionist paradigm. This is primarily although not exclusively within, the context of a post-race paradigm.

For Anoop Nayak, post-race writing adopts an 'anti-foundational perspective which claims that race is a fiction, only ever given substance through the illusion of performance,¹⁶ action and utterances, where repetition makes it appear as if real' (Nayak 2006, p.416). Post-race formulations provide an opening to test, re-conceptualize and question whether we can forego race as a meaningful concept for the twenty-first century by disturbing the 'normative phantasms' of race. For Nayak, ethnographic race writers are ideally situated to assess the productiveness of post-race thinking, by exploring the points of connection and dissonance between academic theory and everyday practice. He suggests that while it may not provide ethnographers with the immediate solution to the problem of race, it is by engaging with the 'complicated clutter of daily life that race can be 'subverted, crossed over and perhaps eventually crossed out' (Nayak 2006, p.427). This is a slightly different approach to that of authors such as Ali (2003), Gilroy (2000), Miles (2009) and Montague (1997) who also question the continued salience of race as a critical concept within society. For these and other

¹⁶ The performativity of race is also insightfully discussed by Mahtani (2002)

similarly minded theorists, due to its tainted history, race cannot fully denounce its absolutist and essentialised premises (St Louis 2002). Consequently, race is perceived to lack the conceptual complexity required to capture the fluidity of identities that stress experiential plurality, or multiple social and political affinities. The status of race as a definitive marker of social description should therefore not only be interrogated, for some such as Gilroy (2000) it must be dismantled and removed from society all together.

Commentators such as St. Louis (2002), Body-Gendrot (1998) and Ratcliffe (2004) raise strong reservations about such an approach. They retort that claims made by authors such as Gilroy and Miles should acknowledge that realistically race can not be dispensed with from the public domain in the immediate future. Thought-provoking calls by Gilroy and others to transcend race, ultimately raise a profound conundrum, namely 'how, can the fallacious idea of race be disentangled from its *social materiality* (emphasis in original), 'real' or 'imagined', and what is at stake in such a move? (St Louis 2002, p. 653) As Bressey (2008) observes, for researchers in the area of race, it is important to remember that abstraction may remove it from the page, but this does not necessarily remove issues attributable to race from the streets. Therefore regardless of one's theoretical persuasion, it is important to remain conscious of the 'lived realities of race' (ibid 2008).

This point is prescient in the context of sport, where the notion that race is social constructed is subjugated. In his research at an English semi-professional football club's youth academy, Parker (2001) observed the proliferation of racist assumptions regarding the innate physical capabilities of what were described as the black trainees. European coaches in particular are argued to racialize players, and a 'routinized racism within mainstream football' (Giulianotti 1999, p.164) is said to exist. Within the context of football, British football to be precise, the manifestations of such practices were highlighted in research conducted during the late 1980s and early 1990s, which sought to study the practice of 'stacking' (Maguire 1988). This involved investigating racial segregation by playing position, and it was argued that black players were often precluded from playing in central positions, and were instead located on the wings or as forwards. It is argued that this was due to widely held stereotypes that black players lacked intellect and leadership abilities, but were good 'pacey' athletes (Jones 2002; King 2004; Maguire 1988; Maguire 1991; Melnick 1988). Alegi (2010) claims the practice of stacking is still evident today, although not as blatantly, and he is adamant that such thinking creates a barrier for advancement into coaching and

football administration. This is through reinforcing the notion that black male players are 'all brawn and no brain'.

Andrews (2000) argues that twenty-five years of content and textual analyses indicate that televised elite (male) sport, and popular culture more generally, promotes 'stereotypical and divisive, yet commonsense, embodied articulations of race and racial difference' (2000, p.132). The lived realities of these commonsense, embodied articulations of race in sport have been discussed, albeit primarily in literature relating to the USA. This literature has critiqued the role of race in leading 'social institutions such as the media, education, the economy, and the black family itself all serve to systematically channel disproportionately large numbers of young black men into American football, basketball, boxing and baseball' (Messner 1989, p.72). In a later chapter I draw on these insights to investigate the role played by commonsense, embodied articulations of race in the decision to pursue a career in professional football.

The reference to a materiality or embodied notion of race links to the theorisations of Kay Anderson, Rachel Slocum and Arun Saldanha, who note how influential conceptualizing the social as structured through negativity and floating signifiers has been in discussions of race (Anderson 2008; Saldanha 2006; Slocum 2008). While agreeing with the premise that we are all touched by signification, Saldanha in particular appears dismayed by the lack of engagement with the materiality of the body, and the role this plays in issues of race and racism. Influenced by Grosz' (2005) notion of corporeality, which proposes that rather than merely being blank slates for inscription by society, bodies become through their actions and emerge in relation to other beings and objects. Saldanha and Slocum propose that race is an assemblage of things, phenotypes and practices, which take shape out of the physical gathering of bodies and their connection to material objects practices and processes. It is through these interactions within social and physical boundaries that racial and sexual identities are formed (Slocum 2008).

To propose that there exists a materiality to race conflicts with the inherent rejection of essentialism and reductionism within social constructionism, nonetheless Saldanha and Slocum (who like Nayak employ ethnographic research techniques) view materiality as being crucial to understanding the persistent salience of race. In a somewhat similar vein to Thrift's call for greater use of Non-Representational Theory (Thrift 2007; see also Lorimer 2005; cf Anderson & Wylie 2009), Saldanha argues that the interpretive turn in human geography has produced an abundance of

discursive analysis, which is dislocated from the bodily practices that shape the discourse.

This criticism of social constructionism raises an interesting point, namely, is there a flaw in the inherent logic of the paradigm, or simply in its application by social scientists? As Kobayashi highlights, it is not only the symbolic result that is important, but also the act of construction. Therefore to study social constructionism discursively as disembodied representation ignores a fundamental component of the proposed theoretical landscape (Kobayashi 2009). Saldanha (2006) suggests that by ignoring phenotypical differences between bodies, claims by social scientists that race is socially constructed potentially leaves a discursive chasm in which (closet) racists can reinstate biological justifications for oppressive practices. Narratives of the racialized performance of sporting bodies circulating within the sport-related media, are argued to play an influential role in the proliferation of racial stereotypes, and perpetuating notions of sporting ability attributable to racial difference (Andrews 2000; Carrington & McDonald 2001; Grainger et al. 2006; Hoberman 1997; McCarthy et al. 2003; Mukharji 2008; Whannel 1999). Birrell has described this process as a production of racial 'hegemony in sport though the manipulation of images of natural physicality', which are crucial in the construction of 'dominant images of racially defined groups, and thus a major mechanism for the reproduction of racial relations' (1989, p. 222). Like phenotype based racism, this relies on the interaction between vernacular habits, and the established tradition of reading racial and social worth from surface bodily differences (Amin 2010)

According to Homi Bhabha, the false assumption of the stereotype portrayed by the media relies on fixating and stabilizing a particular discourse to a specific context, denying the acknowledgement of subjective identities (Bhabha 1984; Bhabha 1996). Several studies have drawn on such thinking, to discuss how the myth of the natural black athlete circulating in the media is both pervasive and difficult to destabilize (Azzarito and Solmon 2006; Carrington and McDonald 2001; Harrison and Lawrence 2004; Harrison et al. 2004; Hayes and Sugden 1999; Stone et al. 1999). It has been suggested that application of Bhabha's writings regarding the potential vulnerability of racial stereotypes provides an opportunity to resist, and transform the representation of sports men (and women) in the sports media. Influenced by social constructionism, studies such as Azzarito and Harrison (2008), Hayes and Sugden (1999), King (2004), McCarthy et al (2003), Messner (1989) and Rasmussen et al (2003) highlight how perceptions of athletic performance based on racial stereotypes distort the outlooks of a multitude of actors,

ranging from American high school and college pupils, UK physical education teachers, professional/semi-professional football players and professional athletics coaches respectively. This situation is reminiscent of Hall's (2003) analysis of the mass media's role in the production, reproduction and transformation of ideologies. Hall suggests that ideologies function best when we are unaware of the taken for granted premises on which they reside, therefore we 'speak through' ideological discourses already circulating within society, which provide 'a means of 'making sense' of social relations and our place in them' (Hall 2003, p.90).

In this sub section, I showed how sporting competitions such as football function as focal points for the ideological re/production of social orders, and this applies to understandings of race. I argued that race plays a decisive role in the decision to pursue a career in sport. Based on my review of literature on the topic of race, I acknowledge that the concept is socially constructed, yet like Nayak I propose that in order to comprehend its continued salience we must strive to understand the moments within which race is performed, and interrogate these instances accordingly. This cannot be done without appreciating both its discursive and material components, for as Slocum argues, bodily differences are observed, emerge and are consumed in particular ways within a racialized society. These insights contribute to my later exposition of how notions of race become embodied in the training practices taking place at Ghanaian football clubs. Sporting contests take on racial significance, which are both influenced by and influences our common sense understandings of embodied sporting practices, particularly notions of sporting ability attributed to race. At present most of these discussions are framed within the paradigm of social constructionism, which while disrupting notions of its biological essence also evades the issue of bodily practices. In the following section I turn our attention to the subject of gender, because as noted by Messner, a focus on race has tended to obscure other aspects of subjectivity for the young people involved in sport.

2.4.2 Gender: From masculinity to masculinities

Sporting competitions were initially theorized as social institutions through which manly qualities and virtues could be learnt and displayed, in an endeavor to circumvent wider social, political and economic processes of feminization. Sports were seen, in effect, as a symbolic effort to reinforce a patriarchal structure of domination over women (Bridel & Rail 2007; Carniel 2009; Connell 2008; hooks 2004; Manzenreiter 2008; Messner 1997; Pringle 2005). Consequently, unless female athletes were under investigation, earlier

theorizations of sport were deemed to habitually conflate race and gender (Messner 1997; Messner & Sabo 1990; Thorpe 2010). Messner (1989) and Mercer (1994) note that the rise of sport as a social institution in the late 19th and early 20th century had at least as much to do with men's class and racial relationships with other men, as it did with enforcing patriarchal subjugation. Traditionally, male admission into the sphere of social sporting institutions were regulated through formalized racial segregation, as highlighted for example in the literature regarding football during South African apartheid (Alegi & Bolsmann 2010; Bolsmann et al. 2007; Darby 2008). Therefore when males of different races did compete directly and publicly, such competitions were staged on the proviso that those racially demarcated as white would be victorious, thereby maintaining the racial status quo. The 1936 Berlin Olympics is a famous example of the impossibility of successfully controlling this staging, and very often where this could not be guaranteed prohibition or segregation was imposed (Carrington 1998).

When attempting to understand the concept of gender, it is important to begin by remembering that although sex and gender are often conceptualised dualistically, there are places where humans are not recognized in this manner. There are languages around the world that identify at least a trichotomy of biological distinctions e.g. male, female and neuter. Furthermore, most discussions of gender particularly in Anglophone societies, reduce this to a dichotomy through the removal of the third category (Connell 2002). Starting from a biological classification attributable to dualistic notions of sex, renowned sociologist Raewyn Connell defines gender as 'the social or psychological difference that corresponds to that divide, elaborates it, or is caused by it' (Connell 2002, p.8). The term gender has obtained a similar definition within the social sciences more broadly, including in geography, whereby gender is contrasted with sex, with the latter attributed to biology (nature), and the former socially constructed discourses (culture). Although not limited exclusively to feminist cultural and social geography, this area of the discipline is where key theoretical work has been undertaken (Longhurst 2001; McDowell 1993a; McDowell 1993b). However, this dualism between sex and gender is considered inherently problematic. For while feminist theorisation that delineated sex and gender sought to nullify the essentialising power of biology, it simultaneously led to sex becoming normalized or subsumed by gender, allowing the nature/culture dualism to remain intact (Pratt 2009).

Drawing on psychoanalytic theory, Judith Butler argues that although this leads to gender appearing as 'neither the causal result of sex nor

seemingly as fixed as sex', it 'implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic¹⁷ relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it' (1998, p.29). Further theorizing ultimately leads Butler to many fascinating conclusions, two of which shall be highlighted here. Firstly, Butler uses a Foucauldian analysis of the body to argue that both sex and gender are socially constructed, with neither retaining ontological status. Secondly and perhaps most famously, leading on from West and Zimmerman (1987), is the notion of performativity or 'gender parody'. This is where discursive gendered identities emerge through stylized repetitive performances, bodily gestures and desires that seek to mimic an ideal norm, when there is no true original to imitate (Butler 1998). Additionally, using speech act theory this performance is further clarified as discursive practices that perform or produce that which has been named, thus performativity is not an act of choice, but the replication of norms. Interestingly, although coming from slightly different perspectives one can see parallels with Nayak's post race theorizations regarding the performance of race.

Butler's stance is certainly persuasive, however I concur with Nelson (1999), who suggests that Butler's 'gender parody' ontologically assumes an abstracted subject, in the sense that they are abstracted as a subject position in a given discourse, which consequently provides no scope for 'theorizing conscious reflexivity, negotiation or agency in the doing of identity' (ibid 1999, p.331). Secondly, while it disrupts the nature/culture binary, Butler's approach is often accused of leaving gender disembodied, seemingly 'set adrift in a sea of cultural significations, discursive practices, and power configurations' (Bigwood 1998, p.102). My understanding of Butler's reasoning for a disavowal of matter is due to its historical baggage, one nestled within discourses of sex and sexuality. Consequently the materiality of the gendered body is not a point prior to discourse but its effect, therefore the focus must remain on the discursive element, as it provides a site for disrupting established orders.

We can see that similarly to discussions taking place within the field of race theorization, the charge of prioritizing the discursive at the cost of the material is also present within discussions on gender. For example, Bigwood (1998) argues that the body is an 'indeterminate constancy that is culturally and historically contextualized, on the one hand, yet part of our embodied givenness on the other' (1998, p.112). Moreover, Elizabeth Grosz has also articulately called for an engagement with materiality, while approving of

¹⁷ Proposes a direct relationship of imitation or reflection between signs and objects (Hall 1997, p.35)

Butler's conceptualization of gender as a form of cultural and representational ideal, Grosz contends that feminist theorizations of gender have remained 'uninterested in or unconvinced about the relevance of focusing on bodies in accounts of subjectivity' (Grosz 1994, p.7). Interestingly, for Grosz there is in fact no real material body, cultural and historical representations serve to constitute and *produce* particular bodies as culturally, sexually or racially specific determinate types (Grosz 1994). Therefore in order to truly comprehend gender and associated issues, attention must be paid to matter, as it is the prerequisite for ensuring the stabilization and or destabilization of gender and identities more generally (Grosz 1995; Grosz 2005 see also; Bordo 1998; Bordo 1992).

In the context of sport, discourse and materiality are both evident in the depiction of gendered and racialized sporting identities. Black male athletes are consistently depicted as aggressive, explosive, powerful, energetic and quick but with impulsive and wild moments, where deficiencies in their cognitive capabilities result in tactical naivety and a lack of composure at important moments¹⁸ (Davis and Harris 1998; McCarthy and Jones 1997; Murrell and Curtis, 1994; Simons 2003). Conversely, white male athletes are consistently described in terms of intellect, tactical awareness, determination and hard work (Davis and Harris 1998; McCarthy and Jones 1997; Murrell and Curtis 1994; Simons 2003), while black sporting success is rarely attributed to hard work, technique, or intellectual strategy (Azzarito & Harrison Jr 2008). Intelligence is generally perceived as more developed than physicality on the evolutionary scale, due to the latter's association with primitivism, thus black physicality becomes evidence of intellectual inferiority (Coakley 2004; Simons 2003). When read within a black-white racial binary, the successful black male athlete becomes an exemplar of masculine toughness and idolized for his sheer physicality (Connell 2005). Yet this sporting success is negated due to an innate physical advantage in comparison to other racialized athletes. In western knowledge the mind and body are often conceptualised separately. This division has been theoretically and historically gendered, with mind and body implicitly associated with masculinity and femininity respectively (Grosz 1994).

The juxtaposition of assumed natural athletic ability rooted within the black male body against white intelligence serves to feminize African masculinity, and thus counter the alleged enhancement of black masculinities

¹⁸ A notable and extremely contemporary example being football analyst Alan Hansen's comments regarding England footballer Theo Walcott lacking a 'football brain' and the ensuing debate in the media (Hansen 2010; Wright 2010)

gained through sporting prowess, while simultaneously affirming the authority of white masculinities. This raises the question as to what happens if we look beyond the black-white racial binary at the gender relations within for example the West African context, where sporting competitions may not be demarcated by the aforementioned binary. What effect, if any, do depictions of supposedly natural black male athletes have on constructions of masculinity, and how if it all does this influence African football migration? I elaborate on these topics in subsequent chapters.

In a manner similar to Butler, Connell proposed that gender is constantly produced and reproduced in social practice, replacing an underlying biological basis with a social constructionism of the body. Yet for Connell, bodies are addressed by social processes and are drawn into history without ceasing to be bodies- being both objects of social practice and agents in social practice, not solely signs or positions in discourse- because their materiality continues to matter. A feedback mechanism links bodily processes and social structures, a process that Connell (2002) terms 'social embodiment' or when viewed from the point of the body, 'body reflective practice', a form of human social conduct in which bodies are both agents and objects. As agents in social practice, bodies partake in the creation of their social reality therefore the latter is not simply reproduced, but reconstituted by these practices. Accordingly, as Berg and Longhurst (2003) observe, in order to avoid defining masculinity in essentialist or normative terms, the context of gender relations within which it resides must be acknowledged. Connell's definition is therefore fitting:

Masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of those practices in bodily experience, personality and culture (Connell 2005, p.71).

It is now widely argued that masculinities should be employed as the basis of inquiry, to allow for a critical analysis between various constructions of masculinity and to also identify power inequalities among these constructions (Beynon 2002; Connell 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Demetriou 2001; Donaldson 1993; Ghail 1996; Haywood & Ghail 2003; Morrell 1998; Ouzgane & Morrell 2005). Masculinities were proposed as incorporating cultural, spatial and temporal specificities and the concept of a uniform masculinity (or femininity) was deemed fallacious (Beynon 2002; Connell 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Demetriou 2001; Donaldson 1993; Ghail 1996; Haywood & Ghail 2003; Morrell 1998; Ouzgane & Morrell

2005). Crucial to these discussions has been Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, which when initially introduced by Carrigan, Connell and Lee in 1985 was a considered a pivotal moment within gender studies. It rejected the normative position of uniformity ascribed to men and posited the existence of alterity within, as well as among gender categories (Backett-Milburn & McKie 2001; Beynon 2002; Connell 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005; Mac an Ghaill 1996; Ouzgane & Morrell 2005; Reeser 2010).

Hegemonic masculinity, as defined by its founding author, is 'the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allowed men's dominance over women to continue' (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p.222). It was deemed to exemplify the most revered way of being a man, while obliging all other men to situate themselves in relation to it. Concordantly within this schema of thought, hegemonic masculinity was also envisioned as being on top of a hierarchy of historically specific masculinities. This ensures the perpetuation of the gender order, a process which allows for dominance not only over women, but also over other forms of 'subordinated', 'complicit' and 'marginalized' masculinities, consequently connecting the relations within and between genders (Beynon 2002; Coles 2009; Connell 1996; Connell 2005; Demetriou 2001; Haywood & Ghaill 2003; Hearn 2004; Schippers 2007). This was considered a viable way to both critique and understand the realism of a society where 'not all men have the same amount or type of power, the same opportunities and consequently the same life trajectories' (Ouzgane & Morrell 2005, p.12). I draw on these insights in subsequent chapters to shed light on why male West African youth find the lifestyles of modern African footballers so captivating, and the role this plays in the migration process, particularly the recourse to become 'entrepreneurs of self'.

Connell's influence reemerges and becomes apparent again within the context of contemporary discussions relating to African masculinities, as Anfred (2005), Ouzgane and Morrell (2005) and Morrell (1998; 2001) note that contemporary attempts to comprehend African men analytically should begin from a position of acknowledged multiplicity. To clarify, this is not only due to the impacts of a diverse colonial legacy, a topic that in relation to masculinity has been discussed at length, most famously by Fanon¹⁹. It is also because, for example; not all of Africa's residents communicate in Bantu languages or possess a black racial phenotype, and there also exists a plethora

¹⁹ See also (Bhabha 1984; Carrington 1998; Fanon 1986; Pieterse 1995; R. Young 1995)

of religious beliefs ranging from Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and localized traditional beliefs. Thus at both a temporal and spatial level, it is understandable that the form and manner in which these masculinities are positioned in relation to other men and women changes. This highlights a key criticism of Connell's theory, which is that while it may acknowledge the temporal specificity of masculinities it appears unable to incorporate geographical specificity (Berg and Longhurst 2003). The spatial nature of the notion that plurality does not signify equality (Kimmel 2001), is eloquently articulated in *Changing Men in Southern Africa* an edited volume by Morrell (2001). This volume uses a feminist analytical lens to uncover the construction of Southern African masculinities in the context of violence, the familial unit, performance and sexuality (see also Shefer et al. 2007 and the special issue on African masculinities (1998) within the *Journal of Southern African Studies*).

The spatial nature of the notion that plurality does not signify equality is also evident in the context of sport. Although sports are specific practices situated initially within a unique 'space of sports', they also exist within the wider 'social space', and therefore function as a focal point for the ideological re/production of social orders (Bourdieu 1991). Claims that sports perpetuated a generic male authoritative position within society, needed to be, and subsequently were critiqued, as they more accurately depicted the preservation of particular forms of masculine identity and authority (Burdsey 2006; Carrington & McDonald 2001; Messner & Sabo 1990; Whannel 2002). Accordingly, Messner (1992) astutely observed that sport should be viewed as an institution through which power is constantly at play. Sport is argued to allow subordinated subaltern groups of men to contest established racial, colonial and class hierarchies, challenging (at least symbolically) the domination imposed upon them (Carrington 1998). This is often linked to a key aspect of Fanon's (1986) analysis in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the dilemma facing the black male struggling to obtain respect within a racially stratified society, which has denied him access to apparatus traditionally associated with masculinity, i.e. patriarchal power and authority be that politically, legally, and socially.

Importantly, as Poli (2010) notes, for young males in West Africa migration to foreign climes, particularly European leagues, provides more than just financial gain. It also endows those involved with elevated social status, through enhanced peer recognition and the potential to become a local or national hero. In his article for *The Observer* titled 'The scandal of Africa's trafficked players', Dan McDougall (perhaps unwittingly) provided an

example of these ideas in the context of football migration, when discussing the success of former Ghanaian captain Stephen Appiah with the player's sisters;

'Stephen is a God in Ghana. Like a superman,' Tina says with a laugh. 'We are proud to be his sisters. His success has made all his family comfortable and made anyone who knows us insanely jealous. We can eat in five-star hotels and travel to Europe, we visited Stephen in Milan and also in Germany. Everyone wants our life...when Stephen was a young boy he was very good at football and we all wanted to help him. My mother sold our television to pay for his boots, and the other children didn't complain because they wanted to help him too. We helped him- so now he can help us' (McDougall 2008).

This quote brings us back to my argument in the opening section of this chapter, namely, that certain theorists of African football migration fail to appreciate that there is something special about this so called neocolonial commodity or resource, it is a human being. The use of neo-colonial discourses via dependency and world systems approaches underestimates the potential role played by subjectivity and the wider social context in which the decision to pursue a career in football and migrate originates. We are also reminded of Messner's (1989) argument that in the USA, social institutions and family's themselves serve to systematically channel disproportionately large numbers of young black men into a career in sport, a situation that could also be taking place in the context of African football migration. As Messner (1989) also argued in his research, perceptions as to what was possible are linked to ideas tied to the materiality of the body. Therefore while the use of social constructionism to understand race and gender is insightful, there is a danger that a reliance on this lens potentially ignores how ideas both influence and are influenced by the embodied practices of sporting athletes, or in Connell's terms, their 'body reflective practices'. Gendered and racialized bodies are both objects of and agents in social practice, not solely signs or positions in discourse, as their materiality continues to matter.

The importance of avoiding an over reliance on social constructionism is stressed in the literature on boxing and gymnasiums, where although discussions cover a wide range of topics, open engagement with embodiment is more prevalent (see Bridges 2009; Frew & McGillivray 2005; Gill et al. 2005; Mansfield & McGinn 1993; Martin & Gavey 1996; Wacquant 1995; Wacquant 2004; Wacquant 2005). As Oates observes, 'like a dancer a boxer 'is' his body and is totally identified with it' (Oates 1987 cited in Wacquant 1995, p.66). Influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, theorists have viewed

gymnasiums and boxing as sites for the manipulation of bodily capital (Bridges 2009; Frew & McGillivray 2005; Wacquant 2004; Woodward 2004). For example in the context of boxing, Wacquant (1995) proposes that if one adopts Bourdieu's definition of capital as;

Accumulated labour (in its materialized form or in its 'incorporated' embodied form), which when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive, basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor (Bourdieu 1986 cited in Wacquant 1995, p.66)

A boxer becomes a holder or 'entrepreneur in bodily capital' and the boxing gym becomes a 'social machinery' to turn this abstract bodily capital into a form of boxing capital, which potentially provides a source of income and recognition through titles and successful bouts. Wacquant then highlights that upon questioning a fellow sparring partner as to why he chose a career in professional boxing, the reply was 'it was just a small *black kid* trying to open his own business with his fists' (Wacquant 1995, p.67 emphasis added). Wacquant's concern when using the quotation was neither race nor gender, thus this aspect of the statement is not explored further. Yet it encapsulates the argument posed in the introduction to this section, and raises some concluding questions. Firstly, given the uncertainty and constraints to social mobility in parts of sub-Saharan Africa as discussed above, what role if any do constructions of race and masculinity play in the decision to pursue a career in professional football? Secondly, are ideas about the supposedly latent potential of black male sporting bodily capital a factor in West African males' football migration?

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of literature applicable to the migration of African football players. I made two original contributions to debates over football migration by introducing relevant concepts from research regarding commodities, migrant subjectivity and agency, young people in the Global South, and the racial and gendered signification of sport. Firstly, I provided an alternative analytical framework and counter narrative to the social historical theories that currently dominate understandings of this migratory process. Secondly, I generated important theoretical reflections with respect to migration through football. These reflections can in turn be summarized by two questions. Firstly, what happens if we move beyond social historical theories and incorporate the subjectivities of African males? Secondly, how is

it possible for analysts to have so systematically ignored migrant subjectivity, cultural meanings of football and mobility and the social context beyond the economic?

I began by showing how theorists influenced by dependency and world systems literature depict the migration of African footballers as the neocolonial sourcing and export of raw materials (African football players), for consumption and wealth generation in the European core, while impoverishing the African periphery. I highlighted that although these theories illustrate the general direction and logic underpinning the migration of African football players, their structural biases fail to engage with the subjectivity and agency of the players themselves. I then turned to Poli's attempt to deploy a GCC analysis to the migration of African football players, which offered a step towards a more nuanced understanding of the migration process. Poli acknowledges the need to not only understand the economic and non-economic dynamics underpinning the migration of Africa football players, but also the human element of this commodity or raw material. Problematically, the GCC framework was unable to achieve these aims. I used critiques of academic attempts to 'unveil the commodity fetish' to overcome this issue, and confirm the importance of acknowledging the interrelated nature of economic trade, politics and cultural meanings, and the wider social contexts from which the movement of commodities derive.

These findings led me to the topic of agency and subjectivity. I took insights from research that has retheorised borders, migrant agency and the state, by arguing that irregular migrants should not be seen simply as passive victims. I showed how such thinking resonates with work in the social sciences concerning young people in the Global South. This literature stresses the importance of considering the circumstances preceding movement, and situating young people's desire to migrate within a political, economic and social context. In the third and final section, I argued that agency is closely related to subjectivity, and in the context of sports this subjectivity is often interpreted through racial and gendered identities. This is influenced by and influences our common sense understandings of embodied sporting practices, particularly notions of sporting ability attributable to race and gender. An outcome of this situation is the disproportionately large numbers of young black men who are encouraged to pursue a career in sport, a situation that could also be taking place in the context of African football migration.

3.0 Methodology



Fig 5: Hammer and Nail

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods and strategies this study adopted to explore West African prospective footballers' subjectivities, and the social context in which ideas about migration originate. These aimed to redress the short fallings in historical-structural theories that ignore migrant agency, which have been particularly influential in debates over football trafficking. The chapter is structured in three sections. First I introduce and justify my decision to pursue a 'critical ethnography of migration'. The second and third sections discuss the process of data collection in the two key locales for this study, namely, Accra (Ghana) and Paris (France), and provide an account of how the methodology worked in practice. A summary of data obtained and an overview of my fieldwork can be found in Table 7 (p.89). My methodology received full ethical clearance from UCL (Ref 1505/004) before I undertook my fieldwork.

3.2 Critical Ethnographies of Migration

In this study, I opted for a 'critical ethnography approach' that aims to accord central place to the lived experiences of social actors, exploring research subjects' own perspective and practices as these emerge through intersubjective encounters with the researcher. As will be discussed below, this approach allows me to address my research questions, to explore the receiving country bias, to conceptualise structure as well as agency, and the social context in which African football migration takes place. It is important to note that no one epistemological approach or theory has yet been found to adequately conceptualise migration, due to the broad array of disciplines from which migration studies emerged (Bakewell 2010; Castles 2010; De Haas 2010; Massey 1998). This is because knowledge of a context invariably evolves as we conduct our empirical research, and this context is likely to be multifaceted and heterogeneous, and therefore impenetrable using one lens or method alone. Researchers such as Bakewell (2010) have called for the creation of a unified and coherent methodology that can be used to conceptualize migration more generally. Others researchers, such as Castles (2010), argue that the heterogeneous nature of migration leaves it ill suited to a unified theory.

There are examples of methodologies and theories that have attempted to conceptualise the heterogeneity of migration more generally. A notable case being researchers who view migration as part of 'livelihood strategies' (A. De Haan 1999; L. De Haan & Zoomers 2005). The 'livelihood strategy' approach to migration understands mobility as linked to various

forms of capital, and explores actors' perceptions of opportunities and aspirations. However, while this approach is able to touch upon issues of structure and agency, it is somewhat inconsistent with my objective of comprehending the salience of both the discursive and material conceptions of subjectivity in the context of African football. Ethnographic approaches aim to uncover and understand the manner in which social structures are reproduced and challenged through the everyday practices of social life, and the intersubjectively constructed sets of meanings that code these practices (Herbert 2000). Attempts to define ethnography often obscure the various techniques associated with this method (Herbert 2000), such as; participant observation, structured/unstructured/serial interviewing, focus groups and video/photographic work to name but a few (Crang & Cook 2007). The definition of ethnography that I found most apt for my study is as follows:

Social research based on the close-up, on-the-ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within) the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do (Wacquant 2003, p.1)

Geographers such as McHugh (2000) and Lawson (2000) have advocated the potential of ethnographic methods to facilitate better understandings of migration. They concur with my position that migration and mobility attain temporal and spatially specific meanings that are tied to complex notions of identity, subjectivity and context. Accordingly, Lawson (2000) has called for more 'critical ethnographies of migration', which attempt to comprehend this complexity. The advantages of ethnographic methods in critical studies of migration are similar to the advantages gained by using this method for a non-migration related study. This is in many ways part of the appeal. It is not that a 'critical ethnography of migration' need do anything novel with the method itself, although that is of course an option. The benefit rather is that ethnographies can reveal the lived experiences embedded within social contexts, and provide an alternative to studies that emphasize spatial demography and positivism, which often lead to the 'human' in human migration being given 'short shrift' (McHugh 2000, p.72). For example, migrations are 'culturally produced, culturally expressed and cultural in effects', yet research in geography often fails to speak to migration and culture (McHugh 2000, p.73). This often results in a disregard for the fact that migrations are cultural events, rich in meaning for individuals, families, social groups, communities and nations (McHugh 2000).

This critical ethnographic approach allows me to address the limitations evident in structural historical theorizing of African football migration. A 'critical ethnography of migration' also provides an opportunity to pursue a different path, and takes heed of Ley's cautionary statement that 'the suppression of human nature in theory first reflects and then justifies the suppression of human nature in practice. We become what we model' (ibid 1989 cited in McHugh 2000, p.73). A critical ethnography allows me to explore the interplay between economic, political, cultural factors and the wider context from which African football migration emanates. Indeed, this is an approach favoured by a growing body of social scientists working on youth, who are seeking to investigate how identity and subjectivity (e.g. gender, class, race and sexuality) shape understanding, experiences and perspectives of migration amongst both adults and young people (Ansell & Van Blerk 2005; Chant & Jones 2005; Coe 2012; Evans 2006; Langevang 2007; Langevang 2008). A further advantage of using ethnographic methods is that they allow me to address the non-discursive, and to study what people *do*, as well as what they *say* (Laurier 2010). This is significant as one of the key ways subjectivity is interpreted in sporting contexts is through notions of race and gender. The challenge for an empirical study such as this is that while the concepts of race and gender are socially constructed, investigating their continued salience requires engagement with the discursive, material and embodied domains of social practice. Below, I discuss how my methodological approach worked in practice, providing an account of the data collected and my own experiences while undertaking fieldwork in Accra, Ghana and Paris, France.

3.3 Multi-sited ethnography in Accra

This study stresses the importance of providing a counter narrative to the 'receiving country bias', arguing that in order to understand football migration and its irregular variants, we must critically engage with the social context in which migration originates. I opted to conduct the African aspect of my data collection in Accra the largest city and capital of Ghana, which is situated in West Africa (see Fig 6 below).



Fig 6: 'Map of Ghana in Africa' (source GhanaWeb 2012)

The decision to undertake my data collection in Accra was based on several factors. Ghana is currently one of the top 5 origin countries for African football players plying their trade beyond the continents borders (Poli 2010). In addition, Accra is a popular destination for budding footballers from neighboring West African countries, particularly the Côte d'Ivoire, Togo and Nigeria (McDougall 2008). Conducting my research with football clubs based in Accra provided the opportunity to potentially encounter migrants from 3 of the 5 key nationalities associated with African football migration. Furthermore, as highlighted in the introduction chapter there have been cases of Ghanaian players involved in instances of football trafficking. I also timed my fieldwork to coincide with the formation of a new youth league and amateur division. I was informed by acquaintances that registration would take place from February through March 2011, and would offer a good opportunity to learn about registration and transfer processes. This was particularly beneficial as familial commitments and funding constraints meant I was unable to undertake a prolonged period of ethnographic study, and I was therefore keen to work intensively over a shorter timeframe.

There were other practical reasons for choosing Accra as a field site. I am a Ghanaian by birth (Accra), with friends and family including my father living in Accra. I also have prior experience in conducting research in Accra (for my MSc in 2008). This made activities like obtaining a visa and other practicalities associated with researching in a different country far easier, and I knew mechanisms were already in place to provide in country logistical support e.g. accommodation and transport. This drastically reduced the need to 'acclimatize' and familiarize myself with a radically new cultural or linguistic environment (I speak Fante which is an Akan language very similar to Twi, which is widely used in Accra). Using Accra as a case study site allowed me to utilize exiting personal networks to establish connections and gain access to key institutions, which can be, and often is, one of the most time consuming aspects when undertaking ethnography (Allsop et al. 2010). For example, before I arrived in Accra, I was aware that a family member knew the owner of one of Ghana's most famous professional football clubs. I also had an acquaintance who had worked at one of the most celebrated academies in the continent, the Right to Dream Academy (RtD) located just outside the capital.

Historically Accra began as a port, and rose to prominence in 1877 when the British authorities relocated the Gold Coast colonial headquarters from Cape Coast for logistical and 'health reasons' (Grant & Yankson 2003). Following independence from colonial rule in 1957, Accra has continued to function as the economic and administrative epicenter of the country, and now refers to a broader administrative region known as the 'Greater Accra Metropolitan Area' or GAMA (see Fig 7 below). The area within the boundary of the three Ga districts and Tema, is often what researchers are referring to when using the phrase 'urban Accra' or 'city of Accra' (Grant 2009).

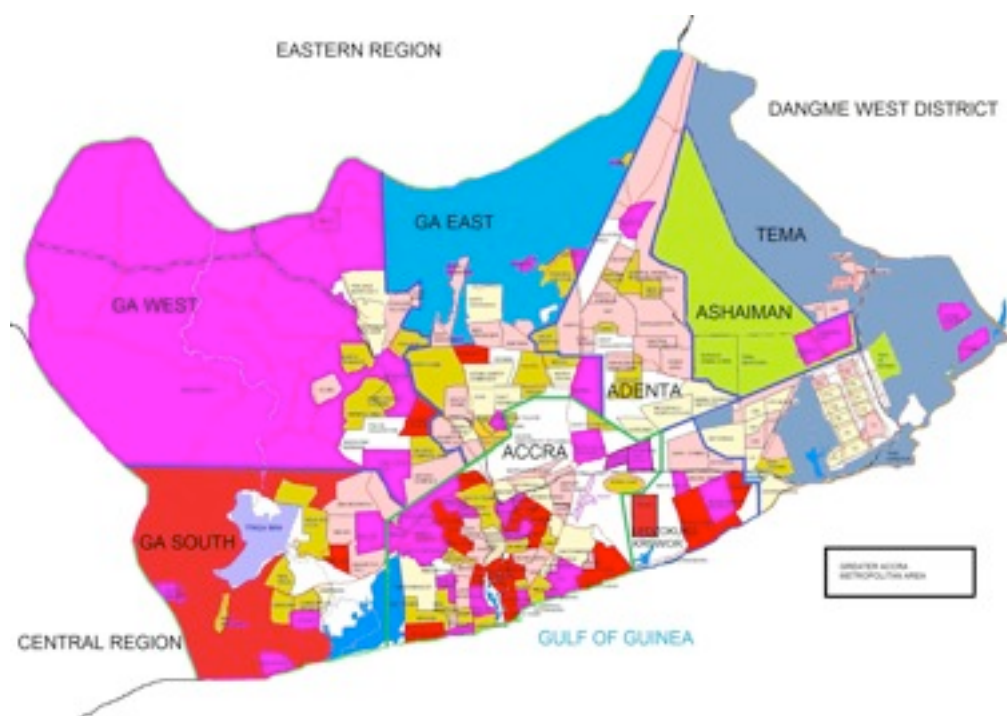


Fig 7: Map of Greater Accra Metropolitan Area

The 'city of Accra' is 25 km east to west and about 12 km north to south, with the population estimated at 1,970,400 in 2007 (Grant 2009). Some authors estimate the population of the GAMA to be as high as 4,000,000 (Songsore 2008). Although English is the official national language and widely spoken in the City of Accra, over 49 languages and dialects are spoken nationwide (Davis & Agbenyega 2012). In Accra the main local languages are Twi (Akan) and Ga. In 2011 when I conducted my fieldwork, the World Bank projected Ghana's economy to be growing at a rate of 14.4 percent, in 2012 this figure stood at 7.5 percent (The World Bank 2012). The national currency is the Ghanaian Cedi, and between 2009 and 2011 the \$USD-GH¢ exchange averaged \$1-GH¢1.50.

3.3.1 Identifying sites in Accra using Poli's GCC

Given the size of the burgeoning city of Accra and the multiplicity of potential research locations, I needed to find a means to identify potential sites appropriate for approaching the topic of (ir)regular football related migration. When adopting an ethnographic approach, it is not the quantity of people who partake in a study that takes precedence, rather the key factor is the quality of the insights a given group or community is able to provide with regards to the topic (Allsop et al. 2010; Crang & Cook 2007; Laurier 2010). Accordingly the selection of an appropriate group(s), often involves non-probability or

theoretical sampling, as opposed to random sampling associated with quantitative approaches. This is because ethnography involves gaining access to groups or communities concerned with, involved in, or living through the research topic, and gaining an insight of the situation from their perspectives (Cook and Crang 2007). Secondly, once sampling has taken place, researching the lives of every member of every potentially relevant group is often impractical, and in most cases unnecessary. This is due to 'the point of theoretical saturation', i.e. the moment in the research process where the range of arguments and opinions that can be made concerning a particular matter appear to have been made (Cook and Crang 2007, p.12).

In many respects this touches upon a key criticism of ethnographic methods, that the sampling and validation methods employed are often of an impromptu nature, rendering findings overly subjective and liable to bias (O'Reilly 2005; Wacquant 2003; Wilson & Chaddha 2009). For example, two (or more) ethnographers studying the same topic may select different sites and produce considerably different findings. It has been argued that the interpretive nature of ethnographic research, the absence of 'scientific tests' to validate findings and the lack of statistical sampling techniques, renders any broader findings accrued from ethnographic studies as weak and unreliable (Herbert 2000). This critique is constructive, however, as it encourages researchers such as myself to justify the formation of their interpretations, by using instances and examples to describe and explain not only the logic they deploy in reaching their interpretation, but also why other possible interpretations were unsuitable (Laurier 2010; Herbert 2000). There is of course an inherent irony in such criticism of the interpretive nature of ethnography, as interpretive practices are fundamental to every strand of science and influence how data and theory are interrogated to produce scientific research (Haraway 1988). Herbert (2000, p.560) highlights four key methods through which ethnographers attempt to avoid digressing into 'excessive empiricism', the first three of which particularly influenced this study.

1. The selection of a site that can plausibly stand in for other cases. If it can be demonstrated that the dynamics studied at a chosen site occur elsewhere then generalizations can be made with more confidence, by highlighting the broader social dynamics and the specific contextual realities that signify the chosen setting.
2. Comparative analysis is a second means to enable generalization. By exploring the similarities and differences between two or more groups,

it is possible to better understand what motivates one set of processes or meanings versus another²⁰.

3. A third strategy is to combine quantitative and qualitative analysis. Surveys or census data might reveal a general pattern, the dynamics of which can only be revealed through intensive, qualitative analysis.
4. A final strategy is to use the ethnography solely to improve understanding of an existing theory. Subsequent experiences during fieldwork can then be used to evaluate and determine whether findings confirm or deny theoretical predictions. The similarity of this approach with hypothesis testing means this method is often argued to go against ethnographies inductive nature.

In order to choose appropriate sites for investigating Accra's football scene, I turned to Poli's GCC outline of African player migration that I introduced in the previous chapter, which highlights the 6 key institutional sites during the migration process.

1. African Neighbourhood team
2. Semi-structured African Club
3. Structured African Club
4. Junior Sector of a European Club
5. Professional European Club
6. Top European Club

Football trafficking is generally said to originate primarily from amateur neighbourhood and semi-structured teams, which are often set up on an ad hoc basis and involve unqualified staff and lack proper facilities (Darby et al. 2007). I therefore decided to use these sites as focal points for my study. Crucially, using a 'critical ethnography' approach prevented understanding the migration process as 'an exclusive economic, mechanic and linear process of a value-added input and output chain', which ignores non-economic relations (Poli 2005, p.6).

My decision to focus the research in several different clubs is indicative of a multi-sited approach to ethnography, which could be seen as a dilution of more traditional ethnographic practices. Multi-sited ethnography contrasts with traditional stereotypes of ethnography that entail long periods of research living in isolation amongst a community in a remote part of the globe (Laurie 2012). Traditionally, the study site is a 'container of a certain set of social relations, which could be studied and possibly compared with that of

²⁰ See also Laurie (2012) for a discussion on the potential of comparative ethnography in geography

other containers elsewhere to some extent, the contents might also be generalized into area, regional, or, most optimistically, universal knowledge' (Falzon 2009, p.1). In this interpretation of ethnography, it is implicitly assumed that time is both transformative and constructive. Yet it is not just time that is endowed with this potential, space and place are also crucial, which is why ethnography posits a long stay in a *particular* place (Falzon 2009). Multi-sited ethnography builds upon the significance of space and place by highlighting that the use of multiple sites provides a means to access a wider range of relevant informants and perspectives, and thus creates an alternative means of understanding a topic (Crang 2005; Falzon 2009; Wacquant 2003). This is linked to perceptions that space and time are in some cases methodologically interchangeable (Falzon 2009). Consequently, a prolonged immersion in one locality advocated in some anthropological texts, which due to the requirements and expectations of academic funding regimes is increasingly difficult for scholars such as myself to undertake (see also Laurie 2012), is not always necessary (Crang & Cook 2007; O'Reilly 2005).

My intention prior to arriving in Accra had been to use my contacts to establish connections with neighbourhood and semi-structured clubs, however I was extremely fortunate in that during my first week in Accra, I was informed of a football pitch approximately 10 minutes walk from my apartment on Oxford Street in Osu. I discovered that the club was called Barracks FC (all names introduced are pseudonyms except for the 'expert' interviewees), and I was put in touch with the manager Damien. When I rang he answered and agreed to meet me at the training pitch later that afternoon. Damien was a Swiss expatriate in his mid twenties who had been living in Accra and working at the club for just over two years, initially as a volunteer coach and now as club manager. As part of a 'snowball' sampling approach, which involves creating a sample through referrals (Rice 2010). Damien eventually became the most significant contact I made in Ghana.

During my first meeting with Damien sitting on the concrete slabs that lined the pitch and acted as buffer for the gutter, he explained that he normally did not answer calls from unfamiliar numbers, because he was often inundated with calls from players looking for clubs, and football agents looking for clubs for their players. I explained the nature of my research, and he in turn explained that he had heard of football trafficking. Importantly, he was happy for me to use the club as a site for my research. Damien made it clear that based on his experiences in Ghana, much of what took place at the club would be indicative of what I was likely to encounter elsewhere. There were however nuances at the club that I was unlikely to find at other clubs

playing at a similar level, and with this in mind, Damien personally introduced me to the owners of two other clubs over the course of the week, Future Icons FC and Austin Texans FC located in Labadi and Medina respectively. I will now provide a brief biography of each club and then discuss my methods. The use of the terms semi-structured and neighbourhood team relate to their classification on Poli's GCC as mentioned above.

Barracks Football Club

Barracks FC provides an example of a semi-structured African Club. It has a clear management structure and coaching staff, and more importantly, secure financial backing. The club was founded in 2001 by aspirant footballer Romulo, with the intention of providing young boys in the local community aged nine years and younger with the opportunity to train and play football in a more organized manner. In 2002 the club decided to enter an under-12 competition and the team performed admirably. This led to the realization the players would outgrow the current set up in the near future, and would have to join a different club in order to continue playing. In 2006 it was decided that the club would expand to accommodate older boys, with under-12, under-14 and under-17 sides. The decision coincided with the club's association with a European organization that claims to help African sports teams by providing volunteer coaches and training equipment.

The organization supplying volunteers is not accurately described as a development through sport initiative (see Manzo 2011), as it provides volunteers and financial support in exchange for 70% ownership of all player transfers. In early 2008 the club entered an adult team in the Ghanaian Football Association's Amateur Second Division, which was then the third and lowest tier in Ghanaian football. In 2010 Barracks FC were promoted to the next level in the Second Division, which is still in the third tier, but a more serious competition. In 2011 the club was attempting to form and enter a second adult team into the Ghanaian Football Association's new amateur Third Division, which would become the fourth and lowest tier in Ghanaian football.

The club management and permanent coaching staff (salaried) consisted of a general manager, a director of football who took charge of the senior team and oversaw coaching, a designated coach for both the original and new senior teams, and designated coaches for all three academy teams. Training sessions at the club took place for approximately two hours from 6-30/7am in the morning for the senior teams and from 4pm for the youth

academy teams, although in reality these were considered guidelines and not set in stone. Weather permitting the training occurred Tuesday through to Friday (academy players also trained on Monday). Competitive games were played primarily at the weekend and occasionally midweek on a Wednesday, while friendly matches could take place at any time (this applies to clubs in Accra more generally). In terms of player numbers, the club had 25 registered senior team players (i.e. the maximum possible) who were all paid a monthly salary of 50GHC, with ages allegedly ranging from 17-32. In preparation for the new season 35 players for each of the three youth teams were eventually registered (the maximum possible), with ages ranging from 8-17. Recruitment remained ongoing for the new Third Division team, but according to my records training sessions consisted on average of 18 players. As mentioned above, alongside the permanent coaching staff the club was also associated with a European organisation that sent volunteers (male and female) to assist with coaching. In the period I was at the club I met volunteers from America (2), Australia (1), Canada (1), Denmark (3), England (3), France (1), the Netherlands (2), and Switzerland (1).

Future Icons Football Club

Future Icons FC can be classed as a 'neighbourhood African club'. It offered a unique insight into life at a more typical Ghanaian football club, as unlike at Barracks FC, it is run by unqualified staff and lacks proper facilities and secure financial backing. The club was established in 2005, and similarly to Barracks FC, it aimed to provide local members of the community with an opportunity to play football in a more organized manner. From its inception, the founder of Future Icons FC, Billa, sought to cater for both youth and adult football players, and more uniquely, he created a team so that girls could also play. There is a designated coach for the senior team, who play in the Second Division. The club was considering entering a second adult team to compete in the Ghanaian Football Association's new amateur Third Division, but financial constraints were hindering their attempts to do so. The girl's team is known by a different name, Plato's Ladies, and plays in the Greater Accra Regional Football League, Division 1. There was no designated coach for the youth teams (boys and girls) and a member of the senior team often oversaw both training sessions. In the event no one was available, training was either cancelled or Billa would attempt to take the session. However, as a schoolteacher working just outside of Accra this was not always possible.

Like Barracks FC, training sessions at Future Icons FC took place for approximately two hours, but as they had to share the pitch with a different

team the senior team trained from 9am in the morning. Training for the youth academy teams took place from 4pm, although again, these times were considered as guidelines rather than rigidly enforced. Weather permitting, training occurred Tuesday through to Friday. In terms of player numbers, the club had 25 registered senior team players (the maximum possible), with ages allegedly ranging from 17-30. Players at Future Icons FC were not paid an official salary. In preparation for the new season 35 players for each of the three youth teams were eventually registered (the maximum possible), with ages ranging from 10-17. At the time of the study, the mixed age girls' team consisted of approximately 15 registered players, aged between 10-21.

Austin Texans Football Club

Like Future Icons FC the Austin Texans FC were also a neighbourhood team, but were based in Medina (a low income suburb of Accra). A notable difference is that while the club lacked proper facilities and secure financial backing, it had existed for some time under a different name before it was taken over by Addae and Matthew in 2008. This club offered a different insight into Ghanaian football because unlike at Barracks FC and Future Icons FC, the owners did not claim to have an interest in the club as a means to provide local members of the community with an opportunity to play football. Addae was a child psychology student at the University of Ghana in Legon, while Matthew was a business and management graduate. Both were in their early twenties and wanted to work in the sports industry. They saw owning a football club as away to do so. The name Austin Texans FC was selected the previous season to coincide with what was at the time only a symbolic collaboration with an American football club. The long-term strategy was to foster a more substantial relationship, whereby the two clubs would exchange players, and the American club would provide coaching advice and equipment. The club had a senior team in the Second Division and a youth academy with teams at all age groups. Like the other two clubs, the owners of the Austin Texans were considering entering a second adult team to compete in the Ghanaian Football Association's new amateur Third Division.

The club had designated coaches for both the youth and senior teams, and they were paid a nominal amount to cover travel and other small expenses. As is customary in Accra training sessions at Austin Texans FC took place for approximately two hours. The club also had to share the pitch, and the senior team trained from 6am in the morning. Training for the youth academy teams took place from 4.30pm, and while the coaches were less lenient with regard to tardiness amongst senior team players, they were more

accommodating with academy players. Weather permitting, training occurred Tuesday through to Friday. In terms of player numbers, the club had 25 registered senior team players (the maximum possible), ranging from 17-26 years of age. The reason the age range was lower at this club was due to the release of several players when the owners took over, who were replaced with younger recruits. The players were not paid an official salary. In preparation for the new season 35 players for each of the three youth teams were eventually registered (the maximum possible), with ages ranging from 10-17.

3.3.2 Researching daily life at the clubs

In total I attended 116 training sessions and Table 2 shows my typical training schedule while Table 3 shows a breakdown of training sessions I attended per club. I also attended matches both home and away, team meetings and social events.

Table 2: Training Schedule

Day of the week	Morning Training (Senior Team)	Afternoon Training (Youth Academy)
Monday	N/A	Barracks FC
Tuesday	Barracks FC and Future Icons FC	Future Icons FC
Wednesday	Austin Texans FC	Austin Texans FC
Thursday	Barracks FC and Future Icons FC	Barracks FC
Friday	Austin Texans FC	Future Icons FC

Table 3: Breakdown of training sessions attended

Club	Senior Team	Youth Academy	Combined Total
Barracks FC	23	20	43
Future Icons FC	23	19	42
Austin Texans FC	19	12	31
			116

Logistically, Barracks FC and Future Icons FC were the closest clubs to my apartment in Oxford Street, Osu, both being within 10 and 20 minutes walking distance respectively. Austin Texans FC was based in Medina approximately 30-40 minutes drive by car, and an hour minimum by Tro-Tro (a form of informal public transportation and the primary mode of travel in Accra). My family home is in Adenta, a suburb bordering Medina and a 30 minutes walk or 5-10 minute car journey to Austin Texans FC. Initially, I spent a week attending training sessions in the morning and in the evening at each individual club in turn to make myself known. I began with Barracks FC,

then Future Icons FC and then Austin Texans FC, staying at my family home to travel to the latter. Due to their respective start times I was able to attend morning training sessions at both Barracks FC and Future Icons on the same day, but I could only attend one youth team training session per club per afternoon. After this initial 'introductory' period, I began to alternate between clubs on a daily basis.

To gain insight into everyday life at the clubs, I used participant observation', a method Crang and Cook (2007) argue can enable the development of intersubjective meanings between researchers and researched, and which they define as follows;

In its basic form it can be described as a three stage process in which the researcher somehow, first, gains access to a particular community, second, lives and/or works among the people under study in order to take on their world views and ways of life, and, third, travels back to the academy to make sense of this through writing up an account of that community's 'culture' (Crang & Cook 2007, p.21).

A key advantage of this method was its ability to allow me to contrast words with deeds, which provided the opportunity to gain insights that are often unobtainable using other methods (Crang & Cook 2007; Herbert 2000; Laurier 2010; O'Reilly 2005; Wacquant 2003). I therefore had to avoid naïvely assuming what I was told necessarily related to what was 'true' or took place in practice. This allowed me to investigate why different versions of events are produced and recited and how and why this may or may not differ from practices (Cook and Crang 2007). It is this attempt to engage with the manner in which people make sense of events, and deem them to be 'true' that often provides a glimpse as to how their lives are 'embroiled in larger social, economic and political processes' (Crang & Cook 2007, p.11). In a subsequent chapter, I highlight a key example of this issue, with regards to the subject of school attendance, or the lack thereof.

I initially asked the players what they did beyond playing and training at the club, and most would say 'nothing'. With the senior teams because training took place in the morning, I was frequently able to 'chill' with the players afterwards. This could involve simply sitting around by the pitch (after bathing and a nap), as was often the case at Future Icons FC and Austin Texans FC. At Barracks FC, the common course of action was to bathe and head to Sharpnet Internet Café, where the players would often spend hours engaging in conversation while browsing the Internet (usually football highlights and music videos on YouTube). Had I merely conducted interviews,

I would not have been able to observe and understand how their engagement with technology and other forms of media influenced their subjectivities and aspirations, or how this in turn influenced football migration. More importantly, in a later chapter I highlight how this idea that they are doing 'nothing' by living in Accra is an important aspect of African football migration, and resonates with research on youth in the Global South concerning a lack of opportunities and constraints on social mobility.

During the training sessions, I drew on a participant observation strategy used by Coe and Strachan cited in Hockey and Collinson (2007) in their research on dance. It is a dual-phase, researcher and participant approach, where the researcher observes the embodied activity, and records the sequence of movement(s). A written description (devoid of meaning) is used to depict what is physically happening. This observational data can then be discussed with the participants, who can explain the bodily practices to the researcher and why they are being undertaken. I will openly admit my first few attempts at using this technique were unproductive. However this approach eventually proved to be a very useful method for understanding the training and tactical methods used by the coaches and players. It offered an indirect means to understand not only how racial and gender notions of athleticism become embodied and performed, but also how local institutional practices alter shape and feed into dominant representations, as discussed in subsequent chapters.

I also opted to use various interviewing techniques alongside participant observation. Like other ethnographers I saw this as a way to further comprehend the everyday cultural, political and economic context of a group or community (Crang 2005). Some researchers have argued that the ubiquity of interviews amongst human geographers undertaking qualitative studies indicates a lack of methodological creativity (Crang 2002; Crang 2005; Davies & Dwyer 2008). Yet it is through interviews (see Figure 8 below) that the discursive element of my ethnographic study was uncovered. In contrast to the senior team, by the time training finished for academy players the sun had often set (a lack of visibility was often the trigger to end training) and the players would often head to their respective homes. I would speak to players after training (normally older under-17 players), but very often discussions with the academy players took place before training.

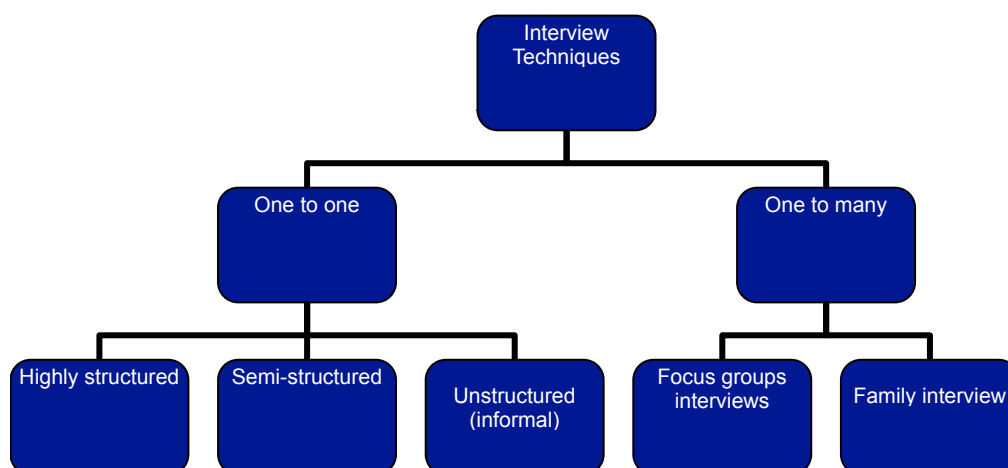


Fig 8: Diagram showing the main forms of interview techniques

A potential problem present in all forms of interviewing is that the participants may provide a misleading account or they may misinterpret the question. In addition, the researcher may express personal views and opinions that may influence the participants response, reducing the credibility of the reply (Longhurst 2010). The researcher's interpretation of responses will ultimately shape the results and may also result in misinterpretation, particularly if the interview is taking place in a second or unfamiliar language (Mason 2002; Ritchie & Lewis 2003). However, one of the reasons I chose to use interviews in conjunction with participant observation was that the latter helped mitigate these problems, by allowing an opportunity to compare how words corresponded with actions.

Given the differential strengths and weaknesses of the focus group and the individual interview, I opted for a multi-method approach (also known as triangulation). This allowed for a variety of perspectives and potentially a greater depth of information (Ritchie & Lewis 2003). As indicated in Fig 8, interviews can take different forms. These range from the highly structured interview, which is often similar to a questionnaire survey, to the semi-structured interview where the researcher and participant(s) may discuss questions around an identified topic or theme, to the relatively unstructured informal discussion, this may take place in a manner comparable to a friendly conversation with no pre-determined focus (Crang & Cook 2007). The advantage of triangulation is that insights from different methods can be used to cross check against one another (Mason 2002; Ritchie & Lewis 2003).

I conducted hundreds of informal conversations across the three clubs (including serial conversations with the same person), which I complemented with 20 more formal interviews (discussed below). As stated above, training rarely began on time but I would arrive at least 30 minutes before it was officially due to start (often an hour before it actually began), to give me the opportunity to speak to the owners, coaches and volunteers. By arriving early I was able to meet the players as they began to arrive. There were also instances where a player was unable to train due to injury or other commitments but would still come to watch, and I would take that opportunity to speak to them. This often allowed me to speak to 2 or 3 individuals per training session on a one to one basis, for 10-20 minutes at a time, and as more people arrived we would engage in informal group discussions. This group context enabled me to obtain data by encouraging participants to share their views and hear those of others. It provided another lens through which to understand the formation of subjectivities (see also Langevang 2007). A further advantage of this approach was that discussions in group settings could be less intimidating, as there is often 'strength in numbers... and young people often find meaning in dialogue with their peers' (Langevang 2007, p.272).

Throughout my time at the clubs I sought to avoid making these conversations feel like 'interviews', and one of the ways I was able to do this was by using my mobile phone to take notes. This brings me to one of the key reasons ethnographic methods are associated with subjective data, the researcher's 'field diary/'field notes'. The purpose of field notes is to provide an account of progress on a day by day basis, and to chart how the researcher comes to certain (mis)understandings (Allsop et al. 2010; Crang & Cook 2007; Laurier 2010). Laurier (2010) suggests that the simplest and often most effective approach is to always carry a pen and small pad, and to then make concise, factual notes detailing key observations or points during conversations. Notes should then be expanded upon at a more suitable time and if possible directly into a word-processor, so they can be analysed alongside interview data (Crang and Cook 2007; Laurier 2010). I found that the presence of a notebook and tape recorder often created a communicative barrier with interviewees who at other times would not stop talking to me. I found that typing ideas into the notes application on my phone provided a great counter to this problem (and allowed me to synchronize it with my laptop's word processor), as did using the voice recorder application. On the few occasions I decided to record these conversations, with the participants'

agreement, the sight of a mobile phone proved to be less distractive than a tape recorder.

I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with senior team players, coaches and owners. These interviews took place at arranged times and lasted between 24 minutes (shortest) and over 2 hours (longest). The list of interviewees is presented in Table 4. The interviews were individual and face-to-face, which provided the opportunity to elaborate meanings, feelings and opinions through conversation (Valentine 2005). They allowed me to collect enhanced detail about personal or sensitive experiences and could be followed up with probing questions relevant to the particular person (this was less viable in a group setting). Some of these key informant interviews took the form of life histories or retrospective narratives. This entailed asking participants to narrate their life story and highlight events they considered influential. When a critical moment was identified, it could be used to discuss reactions to changing circumstances (Langevang 2007).

Table 4: Breakdown of semi-structured interviews

Interviewee (Given Age)	Club	Status	Date
Addae (24)	Austin Texans FC	Owner	21/04/2011
Matthew (26)	Austin Texans FC	Owner	23/02/2011
Ben (17)	Austin Texans FC	Senior Team	21/04/2011
Abdullah (21)	Austin Texans FC	Senior Team	13/04/2011
Isaac (30+)	Austin Texans FC	Senior Team Coach	25/02/2011
Ken (30+)	Austin Texans FC	Youth Team Coach	24/02/2011
Damien (26)	Barracks FC	Manager	19/04/2011
Eddie (35)	Barracks FC	Director of Football	11/02/2011
Romulo (22)	Barracks FC	Founder	05/04/2011
Jonas (37)	Barracks FC	Senior Team Coach	15/03/2011
Joshua (25)	Barracks FC	Youth Team Coach	08/02/2011
Ebenezer (20)	Barracks FC	Senior Team	13/03/2011
Godwin (17)	Barracks FC	Senior Team	15/04/2011
Samson (17)	Barracks FC	Academy	22/03/2011
Billa (40+)	Future Icons FC	Owner	21/03/2011
Daniel (20)	Future Icons FC	Senior Team/Coach	24/02/2011
Kwabena (22)	Future Icons FC	Senior Team	26/02/2011
Richard (15)	Future Icons FC	Academy	02/04/2011
Kojo (17)	Future Icons FC	Academy	17/04/2011
Mo (17)	Future Icons FC	Academy	10/04/2011

It is important in ethnographic research to be reflexive. Some critics have argued that ethnographers give this issue too little attention, and pay insufficient recognition to the possibility that the acts of observation and representation are strongly linked to issues of power and bias (Allsop et al. 2010; Herbert 2000). Langevang (2007) has argued this is particularly important when working with young people, or those who are or have been marginalized. I tried to make reflexive notes in my field diary, and I will highlight some examples below. While I agree that reflexivity is important, the extent to which I or another researcher is able to fully understand the dynamics of a social situation is debatable. Thus there is also a danger of becoming embroiled in 'ethnographic hypocrisy, a systematic rewarding of style over substance by trading in the rites of the field and the voice of the Other for the art of prose and the examination of the Self' (Murphy 2002 cited in Crang 2003, p.498).

I had planned to also use the set of ethnographic methods often associated with developmental research, termed 'participatory action research' (PAR). A central aim of PAR is to generate knowledge from the perspective of those being researched to alleviate power biases and help identify factors and practices relevant to the participants themselves (see Beazley & Ennew 2006, p.191). I considered using essays, lifelines (imagined futures), written diaries and maps depicting players' own understanding of migration to uncover issues that did not emerge 'organically', through other research techniques. The lifelines method requires the participant to predict their life situation in the immediate and distant future, to facilitate a discussion about plans and imaginations (Langevang 2007). This could be a useful way not only to better understand the migratory aspirations of the players, but also other topics, such as for example contingency plans (would they stay abroad if unsuccessful at a football trial?).

Researchers working with young people in the Global South have stressed the importance of using methods that enable participants to take control of the research process (Ansell & Van Blerk 2005; Langevang 2007; Young & Barrett 2001), yet I found these PAR methods to be highly unsuitable at all three clubs. A combination of my inability to adequately promote or present the methods, and the low levels of educational attainment of the majority of players were perhaps contributing factors. However, the key issue was simply that the players were more comfortable communicating verbally. I found that PAR methods, particularly those that focused on the construction of visual data, actually served to confuse participants as to the nature and purpose of my research project.

These problems with PAR also reflected my positionality, which was more complex than being simply an outsider, but also fell short of being an insider. I concur with Crang (2003) that the binary of insider (good but impossible) and outsider (bad but inevitable) is too formulaic. A researcher's position is rarely stable, in the sense that multiple versions of the research project tend to be presented to 'funders, colleagues, friends, family, peers and (different) respondents, none of which need be necessarily the 'true one' (Crang 2003, p.497). Like my participants I too was positioned in relation to a 'number of fields of power, including gender, age, class and race, which intersected with my researcher status' (Langevang 2007, p.270). However, until I attempted to use PAR methods my status as a researcher was the least prominent. Rather I was 'Kobby'²¹ the 'Ghanaian from London', a description that reflected that I was from 'here but also there'. This mixture of acceptance and difference was perhaps best exemplified in an example from Barracks FC, where during a friendly match when the trialists for the new senior team played the 'Obruni' (an Akan term which literally means foreigner, but is now often associated with white or western visitors) volunteers, I was initially asked to play for the local team. At half time due to injuries, I was asked to play for the volunteers.

3.3.3 Expert Interviews

In addition to the ethnographic research conducted at the clubs mentioned above, I was able to interview three long-standing executives of the Ghanaian Football Association (GFA); Herbert Adika, Evans Amenumey and Jordan Anagblah (former vice President of the GFA and executive for the under-20 national team). These three executives also gave me permission to visit the GFA office, ask questions and undertake participant observation as and when required. This enabled me to obtain quantitative information such as player and club numbers, and better understand the transfer and registration process. They made it clear that my Ghanaian heritage was a factor in their decision to assist me with the research, and I was told certain information 'because I was a Ghanaian'. My access to these expert informants was the outcome of a 'snowball' sampling technique from family contacts. My father invited a family friend to dinner, and when the subject of my research arose the guest explained that an old school friend, Fred Crentsil, was an executive at Accra Hearts of Oak FC, one of the oldest and most successful clubs in the

²¹ I was born on a Tuesday thus according to Ghanaian tradition my given name is Kobina, and I am frequently referred to as Kobby by friends and family. Research participants also referred to me by this name

country. My father's friend arranged an interview with Mr. Crentsil, who advised me to visit the GFA regional office in Accra and to tell people he had sent me. I did as suggested and found that the staff were very happy to help.

Through Damien, and Eniwoke (a Nigerian UEFA licensed football coach to whom I was introduced by Damien)- I was also able to interview the following people;

- Kate Bannerman (Ghanaian), District governor and the Headmistress of Nungua Secondary School in Accra, who had over thirty years of experience in the education sector. She and Damien became friends after they were seated next to each other on a flight from Zurich to Accra (her children live and work in Switzerland). She provided invaluable information on the relationship between football and education, and Ghanaian society historically.
- Kurt Okraku, who was then secretary of the Ghana League Clubs Association.
- Anthony Baffoe, a former Ghanaian international who is currently a TV presenter and secretary of the Ghanaian Professional Football Players Association.
- Jusef, a 30-year-old Nigerian player, who had come to Accra on the advice of an agent who disappeared when Jusef arrived, despite taking over \$5000 in 'agent fees'.

I also visited the RtD academy and conduct interviews with the founder Tom Vernon (a former scout for Manchester United who has been involved in Ghanaian football for over a decade), and the Development Officer, Susie Daniel. Established in 1999, RtD began as a small-scale training scheme in Accra that attempted to combine football with education. RtD is now a registered charity in Ghana, the UK and the USA with a fully residential international school at a \$1.5 million purpose built facility in Akosombo in the Eastern Region of Ghana (Right to Dream 2012). Since 1999, 90 individuals have attended the academy with 38 graduates awarded full scholarships at leading universities, private boarding schools and colleges in the USA and the UK. 7 graduates have signed professional contracts for international football clubs, whilst others now work in the sports industry or have playing contracts with Ghanaian Premier League clubs (Right to Dream 2012). I was not given permission to interview the players at the academy.

Table 5: 'Expert' interviews conducted in Accra.

Interviewee	Affiliation	Date
Herbert Adika	GFA	28/03/2011
Evans Amenumey	GFA	29/03/2011
Jordan Anagblah	GFA	29/03/2011
Kate Bannerman	Headmistress- Nungua Secondary School District Governor	22/04/2011
Anthony Baffoe	GPFA and former Ghanaian international	10/04/2011
Fred Crentsil	Accra Hearts of Oak	25/03/2011
Susie Daniel	RtD (Development Officer)	12/04/2011
Eniwoke Ibigare	N/A- UEFA qualified coach	13/02/2011
Jusef	N/A-	20/02/2011
Kurt Okraku	GHALCA	14/02/2011
Tom Vernon	RtD (Founder)	12/04/2011

3.4 Researching a 'hidden population' in Paris, France

I selected Paris as a research site because it provided a means to locate participants who had experienced irregular forms of football migration, and because I knew it was a place where many young West African would be footballers go. This group of migrant can be hard to find or gain access to, as they comprise 'hidden' or 'invisible populations', due to their association with stigmatized or potentially illegal behaviour (Cameron & Newman 2008; Tyldum & Brunovskis 2005), in this case irregular migration. I aimed to overcome this challenge through Jean-Claude Mbvoumin, a former Cameroon international, who established the organization CFS in 2001. I first met Jean-Claude at the 2010 'Football for Development' conference in Vienna, where he was a keynote speaker alongside Raffaele Poli on the subject of football trafficking. We exchanged details and he informed me that in the likely event I needed help with my research, particularly with regards to finding people who had experienced football trafficking, he and the charity would be willing to help. They apparently had a database containing the details of over 800 youth whom they were working with, from countries across West Africa, and would be able to assist me in gaining access for interviews. It was originally agreed that I would work as a volunteer/intern for the organization, assisting with tasks such as press releases, lobbying, editing, publicity and fundraising.

I felt that engaging with those involved with football trafficking at a policy level could provide a means to gain an alternative insight into the migration process, and investigate whether there is a relationship between knowledge concerning football related trafficking and the decision to migrate through football. The charity is also closely linked to professional football

players, which could provide an entry point for conducting interviews with successful football migrants and for contacting clubs in the junior sector of European football. I was realistic, and realized that while it would have been interesting to carry out ethnographic research at all of the sites on Poli's GCC, this was beyond the scope of this PhD project. I was able to use several acquaintances to contact professional European clubs, for example Arsenal FC in London. Unfortunately, perhaps given the nature of the topic, there was an unwillingness to cooperate. Efforts were made up until the final stages of the study to at least engineer interviews at these clubs, however none were forthcoming. This situation was disappointing but somewhat fitting, as migrants involved in irregular forms of football migration often fail to make it to a club (Darby et al. 2007; Coe & Wiser 2011; Poli 2010; Rawlinson 2009).

The organization CFS is based in Paris, France (see Fig 9) and shares office space with several other organizations in the 'League of Human Rights' building. Despite lacking consistent funding and having less than 5 permanent staff including Mr. Mbvoumin himself, the organization aims to assist and help young African football players who have been 'victims of trafficking and exploitation'. It proposes to do so by informing and educating youth, families and those involved in the football industry of 'good practices in the recruitment and training of football players' (CFS 2012). CFS attempts to cooperate with sporting bodies, clubs, youth organizations, embassies and French social services to identify and assist migrants, and where possible provide them with legal advice and support. The organization also publishes independent reports, books, organizes conferences, seminars, meetings, training sessions and various awareness events (CFS 2012).



Fig 9: Map of Paris in France (source Encyclopaedia Britannica 2012)

3.4.1 Researching irregular football migrants

I conducted in-depth interviews with 8 irregular migrants contacted through Jean-Claude Mbvoumin, using the 'Life history/Retrospective Narrative' technique (see Table 6 below).

Table 6: Interviews conducted in Paris

Participant Name Age (as given)	Date	Country of Origin	Description
Jean-Claude (38)	06/07/2011	Cameroon	Founder CFS
Gerard (16)	12/07/2011	Guinea	Irregular Football Migrants
Jules (25)	10/07/2011	Cameroon	
Robert (22)	10/07/2011	Cameroon	
Adam (19)	25/07/2011	Côte d'Ivoire	
Armand (17)	25/07/2011	Côte d'Ivoire	
Ismail (18)	24/07/2011	Côte d'Ivoire	
Patrick (17)	28/07/2011	Cameroon	
Pierre (17)	28/07/2011	Cameroon	

Jean-Claude did not provide me with contact details directly, as he had to first find people willing to talk about their experiences, instead he passed my details to Kay, an American student at the American University of Paris who worked as a volunteer at CFS- translating policy documents and information on the website. I asked Jean-Claude to provide a broad range of participants, and if possible some from Ghana, however the contacts provided were mainly from French speaking African countries (aged 16-24). This was because although the organization attempts to assist migrants regardless of origin, there is closer affiliation with French speaking nations. Although I studied French at the UCL language school in preparation for my fieldwork, and my proficiency had increased by living in Paris, I asked Kay (the CFS translator) to assist me with the interviews.

The interviews were very intense with the shortest lasting just under two hours. I was keen to understand not only the act of migration, but also the young men's background and life prior to arriving in Paris in order to maintain my critique of the 'receiving country bias', and to also look for possible connections to findings in Accra. Of the 8 interviews conducted via Jean-Claude, two were undertaken completely by chance, as Kay and I were working in the office, going through interview transcripts when Jean-Claude Mbvoumin arrived and informed us that he had just heard of two new cases, and they would be coming in shortly. They were not staying in Paris, and had travelled to the capital with the express purpose of speaking to someone at the organisation. Fortunately I had my recording equipment with me and was able to make the most of this unexpected opportunity. These were the only two interviews where Jean-Claude was present, and he admitted to being impressed with the life history/retrospective narrative interview approach.

The organization normally focuses on the football and migration aspect of the individual's biography, with the emphasis being on how to help the individual going forward, as opposed to delving too deeply in their past. A key ethical issue with this approach is that asking people to narrate sensitive topics from their past is potentially intrusive and if done insensitively can be damaging to participants (Langevang 2007). In most situations where life histories are used it is preferable to build rapport with participants prior to interviews (Langevang 2007). In my case this was not possible, yet the emotional distance between participants and myself was actually beneficial. All of the participants I interviewed stated that discussing their experiences with me was easier than a friend or family member, who may judge them, or worse, be made to feel upset by their current plight. Moreover, rapport

building is normally justified as a prerequisite for fostering a sense of trust between the researcher and participants (Langevang 2007), but in this case my recommendation through CFS provided me with a seal of approval. Given the sensitive nature of the information I was obtaining and the insecure immigration status of many of those involved, my assurance to participants before we met that interviews would remain anonymous helped to further garner their trust. All of the participants thanked me after the interview for taking an interest in this subject and trying to document the issue (in fact, many were surprised that this was a topic of academic interest).

Jean-Claude Mbvoumin also informed me of an informal football club for African players²² who had been involved in football trafficking. The club was located in Bel-Air²³, and they trained 2-3 times a week. I was also able to have informal conversations with people at the club, which averaged just over 30 players per session, and we made five trips. At the end of each training practice, Kay and I spoke to a small group of 4-6 willing participants (5 groups and 19 individuals in total) about their experiences. The aim of the informal club was to provide an opportunity for these players, particularly the majority now staying in Paris illegally, to continue playing football safely. I was warned beforehand that the players at the club would be reticent and unwilling to be interviewed formally, however if I explained I was associated with the charity they would be willing to discuss basic aspects of their experiences. This was ultimately what I found, and it provided a practical means to efficiently obtain information on commonalities and trends in the migration process.

In addition to the interviews obtained through Jean-Claude, I was also able to interview Iya Traore, a Guinean professional football free stylist and former academy player at FC Paris St Germaine, famous for his performances outside the Sacre-Coeur Basilica. Iya was an acquaintance of Kay, and we were both keen to meet and discuss my research project, so Kay facilitated an interview. Born in Guinea in 1984, Iya migrated to Paris in 2000 with his father to pursue a career in football and gain a European education. He was signed by Paris St Germaine but released at 18, and he decided to become a freestyle street performer. Given that Iya migrated in a regular manner he provided an interesting contrast to the other participants.

22 The players were all from francophone countries, primarily Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon.

23 For security reasons I have used an alternative location in Paris

3.4.2 The challenges of researching irregular football migrants

My time in Paris was very frustrating, and a massive contrast to my experience in Accra, however it did provide me with first hand experience as to the challenges of researching irregular migrants. The overview of materials I collected in Paris (as discussed above) omitted the travails I endured to obtain this data. Many of these were due to my reliance on the charity as my gateway to participants, which given the assurances made beforehand by Jean-Claude, did not appear to be a problem. I had emailed the charity in advance and contacted Jean-Claude upon arriving in Paris. He explained that he lived in a town outside of Paris, and agreed to call me the following day to arrange a time and date to come to the office. I did not hear back but continued to try to contact him, only to be greeted by his voicemail. After two days of leaving messages I went to the office only to be told Jean-Claude had traveled to Marseille (he later explained he was trying to organize an international conference on football trafficking). I explained my situation, but nobody in the office knew what to do with me, and I was told to wait for him to return.

This situation lasted for over a month, and although this was not how I planned to spend my time in Paris, I used it as an opportunity to transcribe all of my interviews from Accra and begin analysing them alongside my word-processed field notes. I identified themes by coding these, and subsequent transcripts from interviews conducted in Paris, both manually and using the open source Mac based qualitative data analyzing program 'Tamsys'. When I eventually heard from Jean-Claude, he apologized and explained that he had been to Marseille and Cameroon, and that he would be in contact again shortly. Again I did not hear from him, this time for two weeks and by this stage I had given up on the notion of using the charity as an ethnographic site. I had just under a month remaining in Paris when he rang and told me he was in the office. Given that I did not know when I would get the opportunity to see him again I took my notebook and interview equipment, and met him at the office. He apologized and explained that he had been out of Paris organizing the conference. I stressed the urgency of my situation, and asked him to simply provide me with contact information so I could at least try to obtain some interview data myself. It was at this point that he placed me in contact with Kay and the data collection process really began.

While my time in Paris was frustrating, had it not been for CFS it would have been almost impossible to gain the detailed insights I was eventually able to obtain. Even with the endorsement of CFS, it was still difficult to find participants willing to share their experiences. I will return to

this topic in a later chapter, and highlight some of the insights this provides with regards to irregular football migration and the efficacy of current policy used to address this 'issue'.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided an account of the research methods and strategies used in this study. It began with a justification of my decision to undertake a 'critical ethnography of migration', which was influenced by geographers such as McHugh (2000) and Lawson (2000) who advocate the use of interpretive epistemologies to comprehend migration more generally. This 'critical ethnography of migration' allowed the study to address the limitations evident in the structural historical theories currently used to understand African football migration. It enabled me to collect data in a manner that shed light on the temporal and spatially specific meanings tied to notions of identity and subjectivity in the context of African football migration, and therefore investigate agency and the wider social context from which African football migration emanates. A further and crucial advantage of ethnography as a methodological approach, was its capacity for illuminating what people *do*, as well as what they *say* (Laurier 2010). This was important because one of the key ways subjectivity is interpreted in sporting contexts is through notions of race and gender that are embodied and performed as well as discussed. This posed a challenge for this study that required an engagement with the discursive and material aspects of both concepts.

In the second and third section of the chapter I discussed how my methodological approach worked in practice, and provided an account of the data collected and my own experiences while undertaking fieldwork in Accra and Paris. Given my intention to provide an alternative to the 'receiving country bias' in the literature on football trafficking, and the lack of research on the social context in which this form of migration emanates, I selected Accra (Ghana) as the locale for the data collection in Africa, using Poli's (2005) GCC to identify suitable field sites within the city. The ethnographies of three Ghanaian clubs were supplemented by interviews with executive members of the GFA, key figures in the governance of Ghanaian football, educational practitioners and the founder and developmental officer at an international recognized academy (RtD). The final part of the chapter discussed my experiences in Paris, and the challenges I encountered attempting to gain access to a 'hidden population' who had personal experience of football trafficking. We will now turn from the subject of my

experiences undertaking fieldwork, to a discussion of the empirical findings it produced.

Table 7: Overview of Fieldwork

Date	Activity	Outcome
Jan 29th-April 24 th 2011 (12 weeks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fieldwork in Accra, Ghana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-sited ethnography at 3 football clubs with youth academies • Attended 116 training sessions and undertook PO • 20 interviews with owners, players and staff at the clubs • 11 expert interviews with GFA executives, former professional players, educational practitioners and staff at RtD Academy
2 nd May-01 st August 2011 (12 Weeks)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fieldwork in Paris, France 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 interviews with irregular football migrants • Interview with Jean-Claude Mbvoumin, founder of CFS • Interview with Iya Traore, former academy player at Paris St Germaine (regular football migrant) • Focus group date from 19 irregular football migrants

4.0 Playing by Force: The socio-temporal development of Ghanaian Football



Fig 10: Supposed to be in school?

“You yourself go to any part of Accra and in any small place you will see people playing football and you will ask yourself ‘are these not supposed to be in school?’”

GFA Executive, Herbert Adika

4.1 Introduction

As part of today's worldwide information stream, professional (principally European) football now reaches Ghanaian audiences where young and old alike are captivated by the performances of their fellow countrymen. The increase in the migration of West African football players to leagues beyond the continent's shores, has given rise to explanations in terms of exploitative neo-colonial relations between core and peripheral countries (Bale 2004; Darby 2007; Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001; Martin 2005). This is said to result in the muscle drain of African football talent, inducing impoverishment and underdevelopment of the African source countries (Andreff 2002; Darby 2007; cf Poli 2008). Accordingly, the migratory networks created to facilitate the training, recruitment and transfer of African players are almost always theorized as being controlled by the West, to benefit the European football economy to the detriment of African football. The core is implicitly proactive and dominant, while the periphery is submissive and dominated. The term football trafficking has emerged from these discourses, and is increasingly deployed as a synonym for the regular and irregular migration of African football players, thus both are increasingly conceptualised as part of a modern day slave trade (Haynes 2008; Lindberg 2006). A dynamic relation does/can indeed exist between capitalism, colonial pasts and migratory practices, yet we should avoid the unhelpful conclusion of seeing African migrants as mere victims of a simplistic determinism, and their movements as an unavoidable reaction to broader structures (Mohan & Zack-Williams 2002).

This and the subsequent discussion chapters, use data obtained in Accra (Ghana) in the form of interviews with executive members of the GFA, former professional players, educational practitioners and multi-sited ethnography at three amateur football clubs with youth academies. These sources are further supplemented by interview data obtained in Paris from Guinean, Ivorian and Cameroonian youth who have been involved in irregular football migration. This particular chapter adds to current understandings of West African football migration by asking what happens when we view these movements from West Africa itself, and specifically from Ghana? In doing so, I situate this and ensuing empirical chapters socio-temporally, and begin a process of conveying how continuity and change associated with Ghanaian football migration interacts with the social realignments, economic liberalisation and globalising dynamics of contemporary Accra. My argument in this chapter is not that changes in world football and its European hub are inconsequential to the economic organisation of Ghana's footballing political economy, but that relying on this explanatory crux leaves much unexplained.

In order to better understand changes in both irregular and regular forms of migration, it is also important to recognise how changes in world football are understood, transformed, rejected etc within Ghana itself, as part of broader social changes occurring within the country.

The chapter begins by discussing how the Ghanaian football industry emerged in the early years following independence from within a supportive institutional state framework. During this period the idea of emigrating in order to play football did not circulate widely. The remainder of the chapter discusses the shift from football as a nationalist social developmental project to football as a business. This has resulted in a rise in the number of amateur clubs and academies. Football migration in Ghana emerges from and through the practices of a multitude of actors, ranging from the players themselves, to clubs, football associations, card dealers, managers and recruitment agents. Many of these actors now have a vested interest in the movement of players within Ghana and beyond.

4.2 From independence to SAPs

The presence of Ghanaian football players in elite European leagues and on the international stage, elicits little if any reflection from the majority of contemporary spectators (Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001). Yet this was not always the case, particularly during the colonial era. When Arthur Wharton from what was then the Gold Coast stepped onto the pitch for Rotherham Town in 1889, he was a sporting anomaly (Vasili 1998), as to an extent were the Gold Coast team that toured England 60 years later (Alegi 2010). While the official bonds of colonial rule were severed on the 6th of March 1957, for many Ghanaian commentators, the excellent performance of their national football team is not only a reflection of their status in the world of sport, but also functions as a marker of the country's progress as an independent post-colonial nation state. Anthony Baffoe, a former Ghanaian international, made this point following Ghana's 1-1 draw with England at Wembley on 29 March 2011.

Ghana is really on the world map now with the last result playing against our former colonial masters. It was very important for our international integrity and reputation and for the nation's dignity ²⁴

²⁴ Interview with Anthony Baffoe 10/04/2011- PFAG

Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first post independence president also recognized the capacity of football to mobilize Ghanaians around a shared identity, and the value of sporting victories for creating and instilling national pride (Darby 2010; Fridy & Brobbey 2009). At the time of independence Ghana was then the world's leading producer and exporter of cocoa, exporting 10% of global gold and had financial reserves equivalent to three years of imports. Furthermore, the country had a reasonable road and rail network in place, and boasted one of the most educated and skilled workforces in Sub Saharan Africa. Keen to build on these foundations, President Nkrumah sought to implement a program of social reform and reduce regional inequalities. This entailed adopting classic 'developmental state' policies, such as the provision of universal healthcare and education (Konadu-Agyemang 2000).

In addition to this, President Nkrumah also sought to develop the sporting infrastructure and advance social development through sport, and he appointed Ohene Djan as Sports Czar within a year of taking office (Alegi 2010, p.58). Importantly for football, together they established the Ghanaian Amateur Football Association (GAFA). In their quest to build a solid foundation for Ghanaian football at both an international and domestic level, the GAFA was also affiliated with CAF and FIFA the following year (Darby 2002). Amidst a backdrop of early independence excitement, a national amateur league was formed in 1959. In 1961 Nkrumah and Djan created Real Republikans, a 'super club' inspired by the legendary Real Madrid side that won five consecutive European cups from 1956 (Alegi 2010; Fridy & Brobbey 2009). Furthermore, in a gesture bristling with Pan African symbolism and evidence of the President's belief that football was a positive means of demonstrating Africa's potential, the Ghanaian national team adopted the sobriquet Black Stars, a reference to Marcus Garvey's famous shipping line (Darby 2010).

With regards to football migration, despite the amateur nature of the game, most Ghanaian football players were happy to remain at home. Thus while the flow of players from African countries to France and Portugal continued along recognizable colonial lines (Alegi 2010; Darby 2007), only one notable player migrated during the Nkrumah reign- and he went to Germany rather than the UK. Charles Kumi Gyamfi was transferred in 1961 to a club in Dusseldorf, but even this was seen as a patriotic gesture achieved at the President's behest. Given the success of the German national team,

Nkrumah believed that familiarity with German coaching techniques and playing styles would benefit the Ghanaian team (Darby 2010).

The key reasons for this commitment to the development of a national football industry were threefold. Firstly, within and beyond football, Ghana's future appeared promising. Consequently, in the period following independence, football players appeared to be masters of a relatively secure career. The game was of an amateur nature, yet they were still known to live comfortably if not necessarily extravagantly by today's standards²⁵. State infrastructural support for football at the amateur and juvenile level together with opportunities for continent wide competition, meant that despite interest from foreign clubs, the vast majority of players did not consider plying their trade abroad. Players were traded locally between clubs, but even at the top amateur level it was rare for significant transfer or registration fees to change hands over a player²⁶ (see also Fridy & Brobbey 2009). The players were valued for their performances on the pitch rather than commercial purposes. Secondly, the government sought to adopt protectionist policies that often acted as a barrier to emigration (Darby 2010). Finally, and linked to the previous point, unlike France and Portugal, British clubs were parochial and loath to look beyond their shores for talent (Darby 2007).

In 1963, encouraged by the President's intervention and support of the national team, Ghana secured its first continental crown (later known as the African Cup of Nations), and went onto retain the trophy in 1965 with Gyamfi on the coaching staff (Darby 2010). These achievements should not be seen as evidence that Nkrumah's promotion of Ghanaian football was an introverted endeavour, confined to the African continent. For while the idea of emigrating in the pursuit of a professional career was deemed unnecessary, Ghanaian football was conscientiously outward rather than inward facing, and strongly associated with spatial mobility in the form of international tours. During that same period the Black Stars went on a European tour, playing matches in Germany, Austria, Russia and England in 1962, and Spain and Italy the following year (Alegi 2010). In spite of the success of the national team and the establishment of a national league, at youth level while the standard of football was reasonably high and the game was popular, football was merely

²⁵ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

²⁶ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA and Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

considered one of many recreational activities²⁷.

President Nkrumah began the process of developing the footballing infrastructure and assisting academies by investing in and improving facilities for under-fourteen and under-seventeen youth competitions, or as it is known locally Colts football. But at the same time, policies supported the belief that education was a prerequisite for individual social mobility and national development. Football clubs then, as they do now, would often sign players from the age of eight upwards, seeking to develop and nurture their talent. The intention was that the player would later graduate and play for the senior team. For clubs with small operating budgets this was (and still is) a cost effective way to supplement the main playing squad, and when attached exclusively to a club these youth training systems are called academies. However, for the majority of male Ghanaian youth playing in the early post independence period, football was not considered the default career choice²⁸. Likewise as noted by Jordan Anagblah, vice President of the GFA, the idea of receiving payment for playing at Colts level held minimal currency.

Nobody asks anything we just came to play and they maybe provide you some small water, but when we finished we went home²⁹.

In fact, as highlighted by several interviewees, football's popularity often failed to detach it from connotations of poverty. Accordingly, as Herbert Adika notes below, a career in football was not only seen as being subordinate to a good formal education, it was also attributed a low status, to the point of being associated with *koboloi* and social deviance. *Kobolo* is a Gã word that has found its way into almost all the Ghanaian languages. The plural is *koboloi*, used to describe lazy people or wanderers with no home or job. Truant primary and middle school pupils were also branded as *koboloi*.

In my secondary school time, we were playing boxing, athletics, tennis what is that game...yes rugby and basketball, at least these five these five disciplines all of us were asked to join one of them. So if you are not a good footballer you can do something. If you come from a very respectable family you will want to continue with your education rather than go into football, and people who played too much and were on the

²⁷ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA and Interview with Kate Bannerman 22/04/2011- Accra

²⁸ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA and Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

²⁹ Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

street were what we call koboloi³⁰

The following statement from Jordan Anagblah further encapsulates the sentiments surrounding youth football in the aftermath of independence. Its low status amongst the majority of Ghanaian's was altered only for very talented players, for many people education still came first.

Those who could not play to the higher level their parents would not allow them, so the elite ones who are educated those are the ones who when they came back to the house there is no football, just studying³¹

The linking of Nkrumah's presidency to football inevitably left the sport exposed to the fluctuation of political tides. Engulfed in a storm of economic uncertainty, his popularity began to wane in the mid 1960's. The ending of his presidency following a military coup in 1966 resulted in a long period of economic and political instability. Accordingly, it appeared unlikely that Ghanaian football would continue to benefit from state support. General Ankra's government could not risk being associated with institutions aligned with Nkrumah's reign, so the new regime reversed football initiatives or let them stagnate. Dr Busia was then elected Ghanaian head of state in 1969, but until General Acheampong replaced him in another military coup in 1972, football remained a low political priority (Darby 2010). This considerably weakened the footballing infrastructure at all levels of the game.

One notable social development through football policy formulated during the Nkrumah era did, however, continue and survive. This was a national youth competition dubbed The Academics, which consisted of secondary school students competing at local, district, regional and national level. The formation of this competition served two purposes. Firstly, it was a method of funneling koboloi boys into the education system, which sought to use the proverbial carrot rather than the stick. The Academics encouraged aspiring footballers to attend school and improve their chance of being selected by a strong team. This approach proved mutually beneficial for the development of the sport by improving the standard of play. As noted by Herbert Adika, the best clubs could watch The Academics to find and easily identify the best players.

³⁰ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

³¹ Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

When we had the Academicals let us say only 30 or 40 years back, we can easily identify the quality players by our local standard, and you can easily identify quality players and mention them in any locality that you go. But presently everybody thinks they can play football and often they are not even the good types³²

Secondly, in an attempt to dislodge its association with street children and koboloi, The Academicals served the role of popularizing football amongst elite, education conscious households. If viewed from a contemporary perspective of sport as tool for development, this policy would probably be situated between a 'sport plus'- where sport is used to achieve development objectives, and 'plus sport'- where a sport's popularity is used to garner interest from a targeted population, in order to introduce education and training concerning health issues e.g. HIV/AIDS (Coalter 2010a; Coalter 2010b).

As further evidence of football's association with spatial mobility, The Academicals also offered the additional benefit of travel, as noted by Jordan Anagblah while reminiscing about his time competing in the competition.

In those days I for instance played The Academicals and we even had a national team because back then we didn't have under-seventeen, twenty or twenty-three so it encouraged those elite students who like me were good both academically and at football. We just played for fun and you are motivated because you will get the chance to travel to the neighboring countries. So while your classmates are in school then you can come back and say you went to Nigeria to play, and it is like you have become a hero instantly. They say, 'Oh so you have traveled to Nigeria by flight? Oh so you have gone to airport?' You felt happy that you have impressed people³³

In spite of political and civil unrest during the 1970's and 1980's, all appeared well at international football level when Ghana managed to lift their fourth and final African Cup of Nations in 1982 (Alegi 2010). But at the domestic level, the infrastructure and policies conceived or implemented during the Nkrumah regime were further abandoned and disregarded, with pitches and equipment allocated for Colts football particularly inadequate³⁴. The commitment of leading Ghanaian players to remain in the country was tested by the uncertainty seeping through society, attributable to a declining

³² Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

³³ Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

³⁴ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA and Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

economy and rising unemployment³⁵. Beyond football, but relevant to the way the industry developed subsequently, is Ghana's economic decline and the fact that the country is considered to have made the transition from a net immigration to a net emigration country (Bakewell & De Haas 2007).

An estimated two million Ghanaians emigrated between 1974 and 1981 (Bakewell & De Haas 2007), including teachers, doctors and administrators. Many of these émigrés educated and trained as public servants during President Nkrumah's tenure, this took place as part of the post independence developmentalism, associated with euphoric and utopian visions of Ghana's future. During this period of decline inflation reached 100%, savings and investments fell from 12% of GDP to 0, all set against a backdrop of drought and famine (Konadu-Agyemang 2000). Meanwhile, the Nigerian government repatriated over one million Ghanaians, possibly in retaliation to similar measures enacted by the Ghanaian government. This influx of returnees did little to alleviate a turbulent domestic situation (Bakewell & De Haas 2007).

In an attempt to resuscitate a collapsing economy and bridge increasing disparities between rich and poor, World Bank and IMF Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP's) were implemented in 1983 by General Rawlings military government (Clark & Manuh 1991; Easterly 2005; Konadu-Agyemang 2000; Mohan 2000). This ushered in an era of neoliberal governance in the form of privatization and unprecedented cuts in state expenditure on public services and social welfare (Konadu-Agyemang 2000). At a macro level Ghana was and still is often hailed as an example of a relatively successful SAP, however even at this early stage the benefits at micro level were debatable. Having pledged to stimulate medium to long-term economic growth, the economy remained characterized by hardship, and the adoption of a Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (PAMSCAD) was indicative of an underlying concern that the situation was not improving sufficiently (Mohan 2000). Between 1987 and 1992, 31% of Ghanaians fell below the poverty line, which was particularly damaging given the removal of universal healthcare and education (Konadu-Agyemang 2000).

Colts football remained popular, but without state support and following the collapse of The Academicals, this period witnessed a rise in informal and unregulated football academies. These informal academies had always existed, 'patronized by those street kids who cannot go to school', but their presence became more significant and the number of children outside of

³⁵ Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

formal education began to increase³⁶. Moreover, Jordan Anagblah noted how children from wealthy and or professional families once again ceased to be prominent in the game.

This the eighties was the end of the time when the elites really played football. That was when children from good homes whose parents would not allow them to play football in the streets truly lost any real chance to just play. So then it comes to fall on those the shoeshine boys, the street boys, and others who continue playing because he doesn't have anyone to stop him³⁷.

Ghanaians continued to remain conspicuous by their absence at foreign clubs, although the first generation of 'path breakers' for subsequent football migrants began to emerge during the late 1980's, notably in the guise of Tony Yeboah, Abedi Pele and German born Anthony Baffoe³⁸. Despite this new exposure, the number of African players migrating to Europe and beyond increased dramatically only in the 1990's, not during the 1980's. Explanations for this shift hinge on the Bosman ruling, enforced in 1995, which is considered a key catalyst for changes in football migratory practices. The ruling stipulated that players with expired contracts were free to sign for a new club without paying any compensation to their previous one (Frick 2009). Gianpaolo Monteri the former director of the player's status department of FIFA, described the changes as follows.

From an economic point of view, after the Bosman law, the direction of capital flows in professional football has considerably changed. Instead of circulating between clubs, more and more money ended up in players or agents pockets (Monteneri cited in Poli 2006, p.279)

The enforcement of the Bosman Law coincided with record cash profits for leading clubs, buoyed by the sale of commercial broadcasting rights and UEFA Champions League prize money, such that the gross salary expenditure of the G14 elite group of clubs trebled after 1995. It is argued that the upsurge in top player salaries conceals an ever-expanding economic disparity, separating a handful of players at major European clubs from the vast majority of professional footballers within Europe and beyond (BBC

³⁶ Interview with Kate Bannerman 22/04/2011- Accra

³⁷ Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

³⁸ Interview with Anthony Baffoe 10/04/2011- PFAG see also Darby (2010)

2008; Kelso 2009; Pavia 2007; World Soccer 2009; Harris 2004)³⁹. The financial chasm separating the best and lowest paid players has culminated in what Jean Francois Bourg (1989) cited in Poli (2008) described as a dual labour market, the emergence of which he predicted would occur if top wages were to rise dramatically. In addition to their value on the field, it is argued that the high concentration and demand for African players, particularly in the lower leagues of European football, is primarily because they allow recruiters to make significant savings through wage dumping. This in effect reinforces a segmented labour market (Poli 2006). Secondly, due to their high profitability, the vast majority of African players are purchased at an early age as part of a speculative strategy, which aims at making profit by increasing the value of players and then selling them on to more financially powerful European clubs (Alegi 2010; Bale 2004; Darby & Solberg 2010; Scherrens 2007).

This has been linked to the practice of age falsification, with players in collusion with clubs and agents often concocting a football age that is younger than their true biological age, a subject I will discuss further in Chapter 6. The passing of the Bosman ruling was significant, yet the man attributed with truly transforming the geopolitical landscape of Ghanaian football migration specifically, and African migration more generally is Joao Havelange, FIFA president between 1974 and 1998. His presidential term is associated with raising the profile of non-European football, as evidenced in the increased provision of places for African and Asian countries at the World Cup Finals, and the introduction of World Under 20 and Under 17 Championships (Alegi 2010; Darby 2000). Ghanaian players performed admirably in the latter tournaments and were crowned champions in 1991, 1995 and 2009 with European clubs signing the majority of the players. The first tournament success in 1991 is considered the watershed moment in terms of both regular and irregular Ghanaian football migration, and signaled the end of the early independence stage of developmental football. As Jordan Anagblah observed, football became less about national and social development it became a business.

³⁹ The average annual income of the 20 best players in Europe is estimated at 8.3 million Euros- during a Serie A match (12/09/2010) between Inter Milan and Cesena it was highlighted that Inter Milan player Zlatan Ibrahimovic's salary of just under 9 million Euros was more than the combined wage bill of the entire Cesena team.

The change started in 91 when they introduced this Coca Cola under-17 games and when those players moved to Europe. Before then players moved to Europe but nobody knows how much they have been brought for and what goes into it. But when these players were bought and sent to Europe then everybody gets to know that there is money in this thing and that is when people started to struggle for it in Ghana ⁴⁰

4.3 Ghanaian football: Money talks

The success of the Ghanaian national team at international youth level in 1991 was radically opposed to the stagnation in domestic football. The approach to and infrastructure of the game as played within Ghana remained amateurish, reliant upon a combination of gate money and philanthropic contributions (Pannenberg 2010). In an era where the ‘grand design’ for development was enacted through neoliberal SAPs and marketization (Black 2010), the Ghanaian Football Association (GFA)- formerly GAFA- attempted to make changes to professionalise football in line with these philosophies. In 1993 all of the teams in what was then the national amateur league were made to register as limited liability companies, and were required to float shares on the Ghana Stock Exchange (GSE), have a physical secretariat, and present audited accounts at the end of each football season (Pannenberg 2010). Accordingly, those involved in Ghanaian football were encouraged to diversify their revenue streams and adopt businesslike structures e.g. with a board of directors led by a CEO.

The name of the league was also changed to reflect its new status, and it became the Premier League, with an additional two-tier professional league structure later introduced in 1995. A semi-autonomous entity known as the Professional League Board (PLB) was appointed to oversee operations (Darby 2010; Pannenberg 2010). As confirmed by Anthony Baffoe, it was believed that this would stimulate efficient economic practices through privatisation and better commoditisation of the sport.

You can see that football has taken off more when it comes to finances because now it is a business and games are no more games they are events. If you go back to the early days marketing strategies and sponsorship packages weren’t as huge as today now that the private TV stations and TV rights are sold for huge amounts of money ⁴¹

⁴⁰ Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

⁴¹ Interview with Anthony Baffoe 10/04/2011- PFA



Fig 11: MTN Corporate Sponsorship, The Hearts of Oak team bus

As a result of this restructuring, the Glo Premier Division now consists of sixteen teams, with The Polytank Division One League comprising three zones of sixteen teams (48 in total) beneath it. The top two teams from each zone compete in an end of season play off with the winners promoted to the Premier Division in place of three relegated teams. This era of professionalism is associated with the emergence of ‘Sugar Daddy’ club owners, or as they are also colloquially known ‘Big Men’. Kurt Okraku, secretary of the Ghana League Clubs Association (GHALCA) highlighted how wealthy businessmen increasingly patronise Ghanaian football, and purchase football clubs to enhance their social standing, fulfil political aspirations and as financial investments.

If you look at our league table you will clearly see that this is the era of the sugar daddies. It is becoming very common in Ghana and they do it for the money and social recognition. Also what has happened is that in the last few years these people are using football as a stepping-stone to go into politics⁴².

Corporate investment at the highest level of Ghanaian football has proven beneficial to the GFA and senior national team, yet the extent to which this influx of finance has been distributed throughout Ghanaian football is

⁴² Interview with Kurt Okraku 14/02/2011- GHALCA

contested (discussed further below)⁴³. Thus at the professional level there is at least income from sponsors and TV revenue to compensate for the lack of state support. Conversely, the amateur and Colts division have not been able to procure adequate funding. Yet the number of amateur clubs and academies throughout the country seeking to attain professional status, and enter the football industry more generally, particularly in Accra, is rising. This reflects a broader trend that is taking place throughout Sub Saharan Africa (see Darby et al. 2007).

The amateur game previously consisted of a national second division, divided into six regional zones, with 72 teams in the Greater Accra region alone. In 2011, an additional third division was created to cater for the growing demand for club football. At the time of data collection registration was still in progress, however forecasts indicated that the number of teams would be similar to the second division. Furthermore, a new regulated and official national Colts league (including under 12, 14 and 17- it is compulsory for clubs to have representative teams at all age levels) was also due to be launched in the spring of 2011 (it was delayed until the summer).

In March 2011 while registration was still taking place, the GFA regional office in Accra estimated that seven hundred clubs in twelve regional zones would take part. Two hundred and forty of these clubs were located in Accra spread over eleven districts⁴⁴. The precise number of registered youth players is unknown, however teams can and often do register the maximum number possible per age category, which is currently 35⁴⁵. At Future Icons FC, the owner actually had over 200 youth players registered to the club⁴⁶, some of whom were no longer playing for the team on a regular basis (the reason for this surplus of players is discussed below). The number of registered youth players in Accra alone is estimated to be in the region of 20-25,000⁴⁷. Unfortunately, as noted by Herbert Adika, 'the quality academies are few and it is very difficult for players to get into those academies'.

⁴³ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA Interview with Damien, Barracks FC 19/04/2011- Accra, Interview with Eniwoke Ibigere 13/02/2011- Accra and Interview with Tom Vernon 12/04/2011- RTD

⁴⁴ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

⁴⁵ Interview with Addae, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra, Interview with Billa, Future Icons FC 21/03/2011- Accra, Interview with Damien, Barracks FC 19/04/2011-Accra,

⁴⁶ Interview with Billa, Future Icons FC 21/03/2011- Accra

⁴⁷ Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

Tom Vernon, a former Manchester United scout and founder of the Vodafone Right to Dream Academy (RtD), highlighted this discrepancy between quality and quantity during a discussion on the recent selection process for a place at the academy. The academy is renowned for its excellent residential and sporting facilities (see Fig 12 and Fig 13 respectively), but also for its educational and vocational training schemes. It is a non-profit organisation registered in Ghana, the UK and USA, which began as a football project, but became a development project (and in many ways resembles Nkrumah's Academicals programme that sought to encourage educational attainment through football).

The selection process involved three main rounds, and tournaments were staged in various locations around the country, where just fewer than 20,000 hopefuls attended trials for 15 places. The best players were then selected for regional trials, with the final selection then placed in the academy for a trial period to monitor their academic, as well as behavioural performance. Successful applicants are currently offered a five-year scholarship and intake is normally from age 10 upwards. Therefore depending on how old they are when they join, players leave between the ages of 16-18. With regards to life prospects after leaving the academy; twenty-three former residents are currently at international universities, colleges and boarding schools, two have signed professional contracts in the North American MLS, and the English Premier League side Manchester City have signed five players in the past three years⁴⁸.

⁴⁸ Interview with Susie Daniell 12/04/2011- RtD and Interview with Tom Vernon 12/04/2011- RtD



Fig 12: RtD Residential facility⁴⁹



Fig 13: RtD Grass pitches

⁴⁹ Interview with Susie Daniell 12/04/2011- VRTDA

The facilities and opportunities available at a select few academies, such as RtD, are a far cry from those found at the majority of Ghanaian clubs. On this point, GFA executive Evans Amenumey provided an illustration of the challenging conditions and inadequate facilities found at most clubs, as did Ben, an under-17 graduate to the senior team at Austin Texans FC.

A major problem is the field we do not even have enough fields for the boys to play on so they can't get the right mileage. Every training has a mileage, and if you don't get that mileage you will be half-baked. A club will have one football that they will use for training and for matches, and as you can imagine our parks are not like other parks they are grassless and very tough. We call it 'Sakora' it will ruin the ball within a few weeks and months but you use the same ball for training and matches⁵⁰



Fig 14: Training at Future Icons FC on a Sakora pitch

For me lets say, I only played on the green grass just last year on an astroturf in Tema. We went to this tournament and I was like *man*. You come to our place and so you see how hard the sand is, but you dive on it because you want to graduate to the first team and there are three keepers, so you have to do it and sacrifice⁵¹

⁵⁰ Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

⁵¹ Interview with Ben 21/04/2011- Austin Texans FC

Similarly to the Premier and first division, the demographic of club owners at the amateur level has also changed post 1991, this time characterised by 'Small Boys' who see owning and managing a football club as a form of employment. On this topic, GFA Executive Evans Amenumey explained how club owners often struggle financially.

Times are changing and people also have to change to meet the situation. Before things were not at all like this thing. Now most of these the small boys who even organize this juvenile league are unemployed. Some push truck and some help building contractors to carry concrete just to pay referee fees and transport⁵².

During my time in Accra attending matches and looking at the composition of the opposition team's non playing staff, and also while collecting data in the GFA regional office, I noticed that many of the owners who came to the office to pay fees and undertake other administrative duties appeared to be 'relatively young'. Initially, I had no means of comparison or reason to think this was peculiar, as the owners and managers at Austin Texans FC and Barracks FC were all of a similar age i.e. in their mid to early twenties (or at least claimed to be). As highlighted in the club profiles in Chapter 3, none of the owners of the three clubs 'pushed truck' or worked in construction, but they did not class themselves as 'Big Men'. The issue of costs was therefore particularly pertinent to them, given that the notable difference between 'Small Boys' and 'Big Men' is their respective financial strength. I obtained from the GFA regional office in Accra the official fees associated with managing an amateur and juvenile club, as outlined in Table 8 below.

⁵² Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

Table 8. Official fees associated with managing amateur and colts club

Activity	Fee
Registration Card	
2 nd Division	5GHC (per player)
3 rd Division	5GHC (per player)
Colts	3GHC (per player)
Administration Fee	
2 nd Division	
3 rd Division	
Colts	40.00 GHC (per team)
Officiating Fee	
2 nd Division	35.00 GHC (per team/game)
3 rd Division	20.00 GHC (per team/game)
Colts	22.00 GHC (per team/game)
Disciplinary Offences	
Second bookable offence (two yellow cards)	30.00 GHC (per offence)
Red Card	40.00 GHC (per offence)
Travel	Variable

In addition to these official and obligatory fees, players are also known to ask for boots, training kits, water, bonuses and even money for school examinations⁵³. As the owner of Future Icons FC explains below, this is a particularly problematic situation to manage.

Let's say you have paid the officiating fees, you have paid the transport for the players to and from the venue and then your daily training allowances, which could be as much as ten cedis or fifty pesewas. But if as many as sixty players are training you can see how much it will cost you for a week. But maybe you don't earn all that in a month, so you are wondering how do we get the money to do it? It is not like Europe where you cannot go beyond your means. Here even if lets say you earn three hundred cedis you can spend six hundred, and when you ask yourself where the six hundred came from, nobody can ask you that question and you can give them an answer. I don't even know how we are sustaining ourselves somebody will tell you that we have some magical wands⁵⁴.

4.4. 'Chairman give me transport'

As indicated above by the owner of Future Icons FC, it is a struggle to finance a club, a struggle many owners shoulder independently. The operational costs previously mentioned in Table 8 often prove financially debilitating. Therefore owning an amateur club and academy is a risk. So why place yourself in such a position?

⁵³ Interview with Matthew, Austin Texans FC 23/02/2011- Accra

⁵⁴ Interview with Billa, Future Icons FC 21/03/2011- Accra

- JE- So if a lot of these people are unemployed or struggling financially, why do they do it?
- EA- Oh it depends, some do it for the love of the game and the passion but some now do it for the money and fame. Remember every week you have to pay and so many fall apart because of referee fees and transport. If you don't pay your fees for two matches then we sack you from the league. Me I tell them it is best to lay and sleep and not waste your time, but with the juveniles is where all the interest is these days

This interest in the Juvenile (Colts) league has arisen because despite the influx of financial investment following the encouragement of privatisation and diversified revenue streams, money circulates in Ghanaian football primarily through player transfers. As Evans Amenumey further explains below, the sale of players particularly to foreign clubs is increasingly seen as a source of income.

It is from lets say from around 2003 that people are now involving themselves deep into this thing and saying 'ok let me see if one day I can get one good player and make something out of this by transferring a player out'. People have seen Essien, Appiah, Muntari all of those people go through, so now they are more serious that at least let me get one person who one day when my prayers come I can get something⁵⁵.

Similarly to the general economic organization of world football, Ghanaian players are not only a human resource for their respective clubs, but also a source of capital, attributed valuations according to their performances and marketability. Crucially, this financial value is virtual when the player is under contract, and becomes real when a player is transferred/sold from one club to another. As highlighted in the literature review chapter, when we view a commodity as *something* produced and offered for sale in a market (Watts 2009), then consider the empirical functioning of the capitalist football industry, then the notion of the footballer player as a commodity, first theorized by Poli (2005), appears logical. However, to better understand the situation in Ghanaian and perhaps West African football more broadly, it is important to engage further with the idea of the football player as a commodity (and in the following chapter move beyond it). Firstly, I would suggest that if football players are viewed as a commodity, it is because they resemble the definition suggested by Appadurai, as outlined below

⁵⁵ Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

I shall suggest that commodities are things with a particular type of social potential that they are distinguishable from ‘products’...and other sort of things- but only in certain respects and from a certain point of view...it is definitionally useful to regard commodities as existing in a very wide variety of societies though with a special intensity and salience in modern, capitalist societies (emphasis in original Appadurai 1994, p.78)

If we look at Ghanaian football socio-historically, it is clear that football players were always *commodity-like* entities. As highlighted above, they have been traded both domestically and internationally since the early years of independence. However, it is in the post SAP era when the football political economy became more attenuated with the promotion of neo-liberalism in Ghanaian society more broadly, that the aforementioned salience and intensity surfaced. This situation is best understood through Appadurai’s concept of a commodity phase. He proposes that ‘things can move in *and* out of the commodity state, that such movements can be slow or fast, reversible or terminal, normative or deviant’ (emphasis in original Appadurai 1994, p.83). Although Appadurai discusses this idea with reference to postage stamps and heirlooms, in the case of Ghanaian football, players appear to have moved firmly into the commodity state. The players became more intricately linked to money, thus becoming more like a commodity. To further understand this point, the following passage from Marx’s *Capital* is quoted in full.

Every product of labour is, in all states of society, a use value; but it is only at a definite historical epoch in a society’s development that such a product becomes a commodity, viz at the epoch when the labour spent on the production of a useful article becomes expressed as one of the objective qualities of that article, i.e., as its value. It therefore follows that the elementary value-form is also the primitive form under which a product of labour appears historically as a commodity, and that the gradual transformation of such products into commodities, proceeds *pari passu* with the development of the form (Marx 1971 p.67 cited in Appadurai 1994, p.83)

In contemporary *Ghanaian football*⁵⁶ this epoch appears to have arrived, and the significance of the period immediately following the millennium as mentioned above by Evans Amenumey of the GFA becomes important in understanding why. The majority of African players are purchased at an early age, with the intention being to increase their value and then sell them on to more financially powerful- often European- clubs at a profit (see also Poli 2006). This is linked firstly to the FIFA world youth

⁵⁶ The emphasis has been placed here because I’m not saying it necessarily an epoch in Ghanaian society more broadly

tournaments mentioned above, considered key opportunities for showcasing talent to prospective buyers on the more lucrative international transfer market. But also, somewhat ironically, to international transfer regulations introduced by FIFA in 2001 to deter clubs from signing players under the age of eighteen. The regulations include a provision allowing clubs involved in the training and education of players between the ages of twelve and twenty-three, to receive financial compensation from the buying club (FIFA 2003). In light of the 2001 FIFA regulations, the labour and investment spent on a player (similarly to that mentioned above by Marx), is now an objective quality of the player. A crucial outcome of this situation is a conflict of interests between ‘Small Boys’ (those with fewer financial resources) and ‘Big Men’ (more financial resources). The structure of Ghanaian football is such that Premier and 1st Division teams, often associated with ‘Big Men’, actively pursue potential transfer targets from the amateur divisions and Colts leagues, where players tend to be younger. The owner of Future Icons FC illustrated this point as follows.

You can imagine that the worst for us will be to toil and try to train these boys then as they get older people will come and poach them without paying money. Do you want to do that kind of job, putting the team together and doing all these things, investing, and the players you have trained people will take the good ones and the money? Remember after five years if you are only involved in the juvenile league the players are no longer even yours as they graduate to the divisions⁵⁷

Ghanaian football is consequently in an era of financialization, with speculation centered on male youth players and their registration cards. The label financialization may appear peculiar, as our interest is not with typical financial intermediaries per se (see French et al. 2011). Rather it is used to depict how the registration card now acts as a contract between the club and the player, so if the player is sold for a fee at a later date, the club with the card can receive compensation. The registration card becomes a strategy for mitigating the risks associated with investing time and money in a club and a player, while allowing for the circulation of money. In this sense the growing reliance on the registration card mirrors that of securitized products and contracts, allied to a transaction driven mode of contemporary capitalist financial activity. A registration card is like a financial bond, purchased with the hope of maturing as the player does. The following extract from an

⁵⁷ Interview with Billa, Future Icons FC 21/03/2011- Accra

interview with Jordan Anagblah, GFA executive and the owner of Medina Colts FC is used to express this development.

JA- Now you see everybody starts asking give me this before I do this they see football as business. Before even in the early Premier level if you take a player you don't pay anybody. I just take him to the registration centre during registration period and I register him and that is the end of it. No transfer nothing.

JE- So if I want to sign your player what would I do?

JA- You approach me and say I have seen your player training and he looks good and tell me you are interested and then we will bargain until we agree on a price, and what your pockets can meet and what I think is ok. Then I will transfer the card to you and write a transfer letter transferring him from my club to your club and then we thrash out a percentage for the future. So that when he leaves your club for another club whatever money arise you will give me a percentage of it. That is how it goes.

JE- So now you have to deal with more transfers?

JA- Colts players (hmmm) if I recall the amount that somebody will sell a Colts player your mouth will open and you will marvel. At this level people will buy a player for 500 Ghana Cedis sometimes a 1,000. Yes 500 is 5 million so yes people buy for 500 new Ghana. That is for a Colts divisional player today.

JE- So how will he make the money back?

JA- (laughter) well the one selling doesn't care he doesn't care. The one buying is hoping that tomorrow a bigger club will buy from you and that is the situation in Ghana today.

JE- What about the players do they sometimes not want to change teams?

JA- No you cannot force the player to leave. Often he will rather request to move he will go to you before the other manager will come. You don't tell the player to go to speak to someone else, you don't need to force the player rather they will force you to transfer them.

JE- When they change clubs do they get any benefit?

JA- Yes they will entice them with money. Maybe when you come they will say to the player I will give the player 200 Ghana Cedis and then the chairmen or manager of the team 500 Ghana Cedis. Yeah they entice them and the player of course at that age will agree and will come to you to force a move.

JE- What is the biggest transfer you have heard about?

JA- The biggest at under-12 so far was 3 million or 300 new Ghana Cedis

JE- So in juvenile football there is this much money?

JA- Oh yes! My brother it is just like the senior team I am telling you. They

get cheated when senior teams look for their players but between the juvenile leagues amongst their peers they will not let someone cheat them. Between their peers they are strong on collecting their money but when the big clubs come, they will just give the player out because the players mother or father is giving pressure. So they will give the card before the money is paid.

JE- Do the premier clubs not have academies?

JA- Some do but only a few like King Faisal, Mighty Jets and Liberty professional have juvenile sides. So when they are playing the juvenile league they will come around and when they see your player if they like them they will come and bargain with you but some of the other premier league teams will be looking for players and putting pressure on the juveniles⁵⁸

Whether or not a player is a commodity in the truest sense is contestable. I agree with Poli's concern that while the term commodity depicts how players are transferred and sold, it fails to convey the fact that unlike typical commodities, a key peculiarity of this situation as highlighted in the previous exchange, is human agency. I will propose a solution to this problem in the next chapter, but it is fair to maintain the argument that money circulates in Ghanaian football primarily through player transfers, and that the circulation and migration of players as a source of revenue is of interest to clubs. Further proof of this position is found in the practices of third parties such as 'managers' and 'card dealers' who now also engage in financial speculation by purchasing player registration cards. They become owners of the player's registration, controlling to whom and where the player can ply their trade and the power to sell the player when it is deemed most financially expedient⁵⁹, thus we begin to see the early signs of exploitative practices that fuel discourses of a 'slave trade' and child trafficking often attributed to European agents and scouts.

Youth team players from Barracks FC explained how they were willing to sign a contract with a 'manager' apportioning him ⁶⁰ a percentage of their future earnings. When quizzed as to what the player to manager ratio would be, Nana said 60/40, Badu said 50/50 and Phillip said 60/50 (this is not a typo)⁶¹. One may wonder how this arrangement benefits the player? Daniel a senior team player and coach for Future Icons FC's under-17 team articulated

⁵⁸ Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

⁵⁹ For discussions on third party ownership in European and South American football see (Dushenski 2010; Scott 2007; Scott 2009).

⁶⁰ There was no mention of female managers, however as will be discussed in a later chapter women do play a role in the migratory process

⁶¹ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

the common response to this question.

Without a good manager who is a Big Man himself or knows some Big Men to make links for you and to support you then you cannot make it out of here⁶²

As Ben from Austin Texans FC also explained

Some of my friends have managers but it is not an authorized manager, it is just somebody who sees you play and likes they way you play. I don't have right now but I want one because they will help with boots, kits, food and transportation in and out. You worn out your boots? They will buy a fresh one for you ⁶³

At a bare minimum the manager provides boots and training equipment for the player, but as indicated above he will also supplement them with a daily allowance of 1 maybe 2GHC. This modest sum is in fact sufficient for two meals, and as one youth team player from Barracks FC explained, it is better than trawling bins for scraps of food- an experience he did not wish to relive⁶⁴. Crucially, the manager also provides collateral for the player to attend tournaments and trials, considered crucial in the quest to secure a lucrative transfer abroad. Conversely, 'card dealers' are concerned solely with the continuous movement of players, and often have links to, or enjoy prominent positions at a club. They will purchase a registration card independently or in partnership with another person, each with their respective percentage according to their financial input. I became aware of this practice occurring at Barracks FC, and while it was not within my remit to disclose this issue to senior management, they were in fact already well aware of the issue. Without being prompted, the manager of Barracks FC explained how he was conscious of this situation when the subject of card dealers surfaced.

Eddie (head coach at Barracks FC) I know he has his percentage in so many players, he part owns lots of players so it is in his interest to move players around. He made Barracks FC buy a few players when he first arrived that he said he needed, so they spent 800GHC here and 1,000GHC there and we later found out he part owned the players. As soon as a player is sold people will appear saying that they are the boy's manager so they need their percentage, but they are just card dealers who are making money like that ⁶⁵.

⁶² Interview with Daniel 24/02/2011- Future Icons FC

⁶³ Interview with Ben, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra

⁶⁴ Interview with Samson, Barracks FC 22/03/2011- Accra

⁶⁵ Interview with Damien, Barracks FC 19/04/2011- Accra

The young Ghanaian players I met were not oblivious to the financial opportunities football transfers provide, as mentioned above players are often recipients of gifts and remuneration when switching clubs. Transfers become associated with mobility and reward, while stasis at a club is synonymous with a stagnating career. When not in the process of being transferred, there is still a desire to be remunerated.

Even when you call a boy coming to play a youth game he is demanding money. Oh yes! Under seventeen after they close they will tell you 'Chairman give me transport'. You think they are coming from their home to play just because they love ball? Even an under-fourteen asks for money, under-twelve are younger so is just for fun but the others no⁶⁶

As Ben from Austin Texans FC explained when this subject was put to him

BM- Yeah under-twelve when they finish they just change themselves and go but an under-seventeen asks where is my transport and winning bonus? You can't just play football for free. Can you be a Dr for fun? Let say you spend the whole day at the clinic or even two hours, do you say 'I am ok don't pay me I will just go home'? No you do it to make money. Essien just checks his account and it is in.

JE- But Essien plays for Chelsea in the English Premier League

BM- There is no difference he is also playing just like me. Football is like a profession now so you take it serious and you sacrifice⁶⁷

The number of Ghanaian youth now taking football 'seriously and sacrificing' in pursuit of career in this industry is visibly increasing, and below Herbert Adika articulates the increasing propensity of young males to 'drift into football'.

Everybody is now drifting into football and it is that thing which is killing all of us. You yourself go to any part of Accra and in any small place you will see people playing football and you will ask yourself 'are these not supposed to be in school?' So you see if everybody will get to where it is good for him then we will make it, but presently everybody wants to play football by force but all of us cannot be footballers⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

⁶⁷ Interview with Ben, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra

⁶⁸ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

4.5 Conclusion

Using Accra (Ghana) as a case study, this chapter sought to add to current understandings of West African football migration by viewing the situation from West Africa itself, in an attempt to contextualize and historicize the process. I began the chapter by highlighting how in President Kwame Nkrumah's early post-independence era, the vast majority of players ignored requests from foreign clubs to ply their trade abroad. This was linked to state support for the development of football at the amateur and juvenile Colts level, in addition to opportunities for international competition. The commitment of leading Ghanaian players to remain in the country was tested by the uncertainty seeping through society, attributable to a declining economy and rising unemployment following a succession of military coups. In an attempt to resuscitate a collapsing economy and bridge increasing disparities between rich and poor, World Bank and IMF Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP's) were implemented in 1983. This ushered in an era of neoliberal governance in the form of privatization and unprecedented cuts in state expenditure on public services and social welfare.

Ghanaian football players continued to remain conspicuous by their absence at foreign clubs, however the country's success in 1991 FIFA youth championships is considered the watershed moment in terms of both regular and irregular Ghanaian football migration. It signaled the end of the early independence stage of developmental football. Football thereafter became a business. In an era where the 'grand design' for economic development was enacted through neoliberal SAP's and marketization (Black 2010), the Ghanaian Football Association (GFA)- formerly GAFA- attempted to professionalize the sport inline with these perspectives. Thus at the professional level there is a reasonable stream of income from sponsors and TV revenue to compensate for the lack of state support. Conversely, the amateur and Colts division have not been able to procure adequate funding leaving much of the infrastructure in a dilapidated state. Notwithstanding these challenging conditions, the number of amateur clubs and Colts academies seeking to enter the football industry and attain professional status is rising. A key reason this interest in the amateur and Colts league arose, is because despite the influx of financial investment following the encouragement of privatisation and diversified revenue streams, money primarily circulates in Ghanaian football through player sales/transfers. Players therefore became more intricately linked to money, thus becoming more like a commodity. Ghanaian football is subsequently in an era of financialization, with speculation centered on male youth players and their

registration cards. Consequently the movement and migration of players within Ghana and beyond is now favourable.

This chapter established historical shifts over time, popular attitudes towards the sport and the structure of the industry in the Ghanaian context. The remainder of the thesis turns our attention to the agency and outlook of the players themselves, as well as other key actors. Like Sharma (2003), I propose that an approach grounded in the material lived realities of migrants and potential migrants, provides an avenue to better understand the decision making processes that result in irregular migration. This is necessary in order to begin moving our understanding of this issue forward. Ignoring the subjective positions of various African and non-African actors through world systems and dependency theory as found in the existing literature, has indeed exposed certain structures that constrain and impose migratory paths. Yet this position inadequately explains how migration in the football industry, as shown in this chapter, is a product of the continual confluence of determinism and autonomy. In the chapters that follow, I seek to work towards an alternate theorisation and counter narrative to the dependency and slave trade explanations that dominate the literature. The next chapter attempts to understand why, unlike the generation that preceded them, contemporary male West African youth are more disposed to prioritizing a career in professional football, or as they say in Ghana, why nowadays 'everybody want to play by force'.

5.0 Competing fields of play: A body and a dream at a vital juncture



Fig 15: A body and a dream

5.1 Introduction

The extensive global media coverage dedicated to professional, particularly European football, and the cult of stardom attached to footballers plying their trade on this lucrative stage, are claimed to have popularized the myth of a career in football as a means of upward social mobility (Darby et al. 2007; Christensen & Sørensen 2009; Poli 2010). This is considered particularly problematic for young people in West Africa, where a handful of high profile cases depicting upward career paths are argued to conceal far more common occurrences of downward career trajectories and unfulfilled dreams (Darby et al. 2007; Alegi 2010; Mukharji 2008; Poli 2010). Poli depicted this situation in a study covering 14 professional European championships, where it was found that of the 338 expatriate⁶⁹ African players under the age of 28 and holding a professional contract during the 2002/2003 season, only 15% played at a higher ranked club four seasons later. 27% were found to be playing for clubs of a similar level, and in 58% of cases, players were found to be plying their trade at a lower level. Of this 58%, half (29%) had departed the professional football industry completely. By comparison, during the same period the number of expatriate players of non sub-Saharan African origins departing professional football was 13% (Poli 2010, p.1008).

The precarious nature of a career in professional football fails to deter West African youth, who on average embark on international migration at 19.4 years of age, which is earlier than the overall average for expatriate players of 21.9 (Poli 2010). It is argued that the pursuit of a career in professional football is often at the expense of formal education and vocational training in other professions (Bourke 2003; Darby 2010; Donnelly & Petherick 2004; Poli 2006; Poli 2010). Additionally, with regards to irregular football migration, research undertaken by the charity CFS has uncovered more than 1000 cases in Paris alone since 2005, 70% of who were under the age of 18⁷⁰. As I will show throughout this thesis, age is a contentious topic in the context of African football migration. Nevertheless a fundamental question that remains, is why are male West African youth more disposed to prioritizing a career in professional football to begin with? Or as they say in Ghana, ‘why does everybody want to play by force?’ The chapter aims to answer this question, and conceptualise the rationale leading young

⁶⁹ An expatriate footballer plays outside the country in which he grew up, from where he departed following recruitment by a foreign club. It only permits international flows directly linked to football to be taken into consideration (Poli 2010, p.1005).

⁷⁰ Interview with Jean Claud Mbvoumin 06/07/2011- CFS Paris. See also Poli (2010)

Ghanaian males specifically, and West African males more generally, to pursue a career in professional football.

The first half of this chapter discusses how in this post SAP neoliberal environment, male youth at all three clubs claim the spiraling cost of privatized education compels them to 'drop out' during the transition from junior to secondary school, causing them to turn to a career in professional football. This moment in their lives is precisely the type of time space Johnson-Hanks refers to as a vital conjuncture, 'a socially structured zone of possibility that emerges around specific periods of potential transformation in a life or lives' (Johnson-Hanks 2002, p.871). The concept of vital conjunctures integrates the vital of a demographic event, with Bourdieu's conception of the conjuncture between structure and action. It is useful here as it allows us to examine the specific and momentary configuration of structures that become relevant in this particular situation. While maintaining a recognition of youth as human actors, who as Abebe and Kjørholt (2009) note, negotiate vulnerability, dependence, autonomy and agency. The second half of this chapter highlights that while constituting one element of a wider approach, in post-independence Ghana successive governments and international organisations have sought to inculcate the idea that education is a prerequisite for individual social mobility, and national development (Rolleston & Okech 2008; Langevang 2008). For these male youth, the triumvirate of education, acceptable employment and development no longer appear connected. Accordingly, at the vital conjuncture outlined above, they draw on ideas of race and masculinity and opt in a Foucauldian sense, to become 'entrepreneurs of self' investing in their bodily (football) rather than cognitive (education) human capital.

5.2 Dropping out of school and into football

The sight of children walking to and from state primary schools in their unmistakable uniforms is now commonplace in Accra. With girls in their yellow skirts with brown jumpers, and boys in their yellow shirts with brown shorts, embodying the country's longstanding commitment to universal education. Organization of pre-tertiary (university) education as it exists today, does appear to have facilitated an increase in educational provision for young people in Ghana, particularly when compared to figures from the mid to late 1980's. Research has found that the current system- consisting of a compulsory six year primary level (fully state subsidised), followed by six years at secondary level, comprising three years in junior (fully state

subsidised) and senior secondary (partially state subsidised) respectively⁷¹ has led to overall increases in enrolment (Osei 2006). In spite of this, a study by the UNDP (2002) found junior secondary enrolment rates to be strongly linked to household income, with 65% of children from the poorest quintile of households enrolling compared to 94% of children from the wealthiest quintile. The distribution of senior secondary education is further skewed, with enrolment rates ranging from 27% for children from the poorest quintile, to 77% for those from the wealthiest. Moreover, a study by Gondwe and Walenkemp (2011) for the 'Netherlands organisation for international cooperation in higher education', noted that in the 2007-2008 school year 1,224,964 pupils enrolled in Ghanaian junior secondary schools, yet enrolment for senior secondary dropped drastically to 454,681 for that cohort.

During a post-training session discussion with the under-17 players at Future Icons FC, the topic of education surfaced. Several players intimated that they had taken the decision not to enrol at a senior secondary school, and had instead opted to pursue a career in professional football. As children they had entered the formal education system not just because it was compulsory, but on the premise it would eventually lead to formal wage employment and instigate an improvement in their material condition. Those playing for the under-12 teams verified this sense of optimism during the early stages of formal education, though perhaps understandably- given that they were currently involved in Colts football- the hope of a career in professional football was present. But often they had conceptualized this choice as an alternative not a default destination. In order to maintain a good grade point average, some of the most talented under-12 players at Barracks FC would often miss training to complete their homework and revise for their exams. When I discussed this with them, they described their ambition to obtain a 'serious job' upon completing their formal education, which for some included attending university. In fact, one under-12 player at Barracks FC was well known for openly stating his desire to enter politics and become President of Ghana. Attending school was one of life's traditional milestones on the path to adulthood and becoming a 'serious person'⁷². So what changed in the period between primary and senior secondary?

The main issue was the payment of tuition fees, and their families' inability to meet costs associated with continuing their education. What could be considered as minor outlays, such as purchasing stationary or replacing

⁷¹ Interview with Kate Bannerman 22/04/2011- Accra

⁷² James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

school shoes, became major factors in their decision to 'drop out'. Nevertheless, they were keen to continue their education at a later date and emphasised their desire to do so. These discussions endorsed Langevang's observation that young people in Accra rarely receive the education they wish for in a continuous or linear manner, rather 'they enter school, drop out, work for a couple of years, and then begin formal or informal education again' (2008, p.2044). When the subject of 'dropping out' was broached with players at Austin Texans FC and Barracks FC, I was met by a similar response to that at Future Icons FC. They were aware that many of the professional Ghanaian teams did not have youth academies, and would therefore scout the amateur and Colts divisions for players to use in under-17 and under-20 FIFA youth tournaments. Therefore making the period between fourteen and eighteen years of age a key time to obtain exposure and a potentially lucrative transfer abroad. However, they stressed that pursuing career in football was the unfortunate outcome of being unable to continue their education⁷³. Curiously, on a different occasion during a discussion about 'walking alone' (referring to being single rather than in a relationship) the players at Future Icons FC mentioned there were lots of very good state subsidised senior secondary schools in Accra (often with dateable girls), some of which are free if not almost free to attend. I asked why the players would attend a private and more expensive school, when viable options better suited to their families' financial situation existed?

The players elaborated, by describing how the allocation of senior secondary school places is linked to a student's score in the common entrance exam and subsequent ranking on a computerised system. This was intended to provide a more egalitarian, and transparent process for allocating senior secondary school places, founded upon merit and academic attainment rather than income. Unfortunately, as Kate Bannerman (District governor and Headmistress of Nungua Secondary School in Accra) explains below, the system has not achieved its intended goal. Instead, it reproduces the educational disparities it sought to alleviate.

⁷³ This was also the reason given during interviews with informants in Paris; Armand 25/07/2011 (Ivorian); Gerard 12/07/2011 (Guinean); Robert 10/07/2011 (Cameroonian); Adam 25/07/2011 (Ivorian) and Ismail 24/07/2011 (Ivorian)

They start paying at senior high but if you get a scholarship to the public schools then the government will subsidize it. It is always a reversal with the public schools, normally those that were not picked by the computerized system they find themselves in the private schools because they couldn't qualify to come to the public schools which are virtually free. In the private schools you pay fully so it disadvantages those who need help most because normally the ones who have got the good grades, they come from good homes and were able to go to good schools to begin with. It should have been the other way around. The sad thing also is that the public primary schools do not do well at all so it is always the students from these public schools who end up paying for the private secondary schools, and yes some cannot afford it so eventually they drop⁷⁴.

The prevalence of youth 'dropping out' during the transition from junior to senior secondary, also highlighted by the UNDP study and verified by the participants, exemplifies how certain social structures not only alter in form and intensity over time, but also become more or less significant at particular moments in peoples lives (Jeffrey 2010). This situation epitomises the key time-space Johnson-Hanks (2002) envisioned when describing the concept of 'vital conjunctures', circumstances which lead to the reassembling of particular material bodies in time and space while conveying the crystallisation of structural forces (Jeffrey 2010; Johnson-Hanks 2002).

Although aware of the computerised system, and familiar with how it functioned, the academy players never suggested that this was intentionally biased towards wealthier households. I would argue that the computerised allocation of senior secondary school places as it exists today is indicative of 'soft violence', tacit modes of control and power that exist within seemingly innocuous and familiar social habits and norms (in this case through formal education), which maintains a social structure in favour and serving the interests of those already dominant (Bourdieu 1995). Yet while it was acknowledged by participants that those from wealthy households did indeed appear to benefit from the current education system, this was deemed one of the rare occasions where it was not due to an inherent bias. Moreover, the familiar criticisms of rote and often uncreative learning exercises, overcrowded classes and a lack of material resources were levelled at public primary schools (see also Dull 2004; Osei 2004; Osei 2006; Rolleston & Okech 2008). This was not considered the principle reason for their inability to access a place at a subsidised public school. Rather, it was attributed to an individual's intellectual and familial situation.

Those who had achieved a successful ranking on the computerised

⁷⁴ Interview with Kate Bannerman 22/04/2011- Accra

system had done so on merit, primarily through hard work but also a natural proclivity towards academic attainment. Ebenezer (age 20, football age 17), a player on trial for the senior team at Barracks FC, who ‘dropped out’ following junior secondary school to pursue a professional football career, articulated this point as follows.

Kobby, remember if you are mbowa⁷⁵ there is nothing you can do about that one there because that is the way you are from birth. As for me, if I had tried then maybe [I could have continued], but now at my age I’m not going through World War II (retake examinations or schooling), for what?⁷⁶

With regards to the subject of familial influence, the issue also moved beyond finances and was framed in the context of behavioral dispositions. The respective owners of Austin Texans FC and Future Icons mentioned that most of their players who had ‘dropped out’, came from low-income single parent households, often with a history of limited educational attainment. A confluence of financial circumstances and educational accomplishments were considered key to the provision of an intellectually stimulating environment. This was also the opinion of GFA executive Herbert Adika.

Here in Africa the poverty rate is driving some people into some things that are unpardonable. From the experience I have had so far most of these [who ‘drop out’ to play football] are from the down trodden where unfortunately the poverty level is very low. They are from the people we call koboloi, those people who traditionally do not like going to school⁷⁷

As is often the case in the aftermath of SAPs and the implementation of neoliberal governance, families and households are increasingly responsible for managing the risks associated with child/adolescent development choices, particularly with regards to schooling (Kelly 2001a). The ‘pedagogic family’ becomes responsible for making the right choice for the sake of the child (Kelly 2001a). In Accra, the household is considered the key space in which the inculcation and reinforcement of the principles underlying an appreciation of formal education takes place, primarily through the interaction between the parent and child in the form of enforcement and encouragement. Anecdotally, I will never forget the plumes of dust trailing a mother’s soles during an Austin Texans FC under-12 training session, as she

⁷⁵ An Akan term used to describe a person with learning difficulties of an intrinsic/hereditary nature.

⁷⁶ Interview with Ebenezer, Barracks FC 13/03/2011

⁷⁷ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

sprinted across the pitch amidst flying footballs and moving players in pursuit of her son. As he was led home, somewhat forcefully, the mother explained he had snuck out of the house before completing his homework. As Ben, a recent graduate to Austin Texans FC's senior team (who came from a single parent household and is hoping to study medicine after successfully competing senior secondary) also explained;

Many a time we Ghanaians are forced to study (laughs) we don't study willingly, even me it is because my dad said I should study so I studied⁷⁸.

Furthermore, the players at Barracks FC who were keen to study emphasized being encouraged to do so by their mothers. The owner of Austin Texans FC informed me of a particularly noteworthy situation, one that in part corroborates claims made by participants that inculcation of an appreciation for education is strongly linked to household dynamics. It also suggests that pursuit of a professional football career can also transcend issues of household income and access to education.

There is a kid on the team called Eugene a very talented guy in the division. His father was just made a Principal (Headmaster) of a high school but he doesn't want to go to school. You see the irony? He can go for free but he doesn't want to study he wants to play football. This is someone whose father is like five percent around but most of the time he is busy. His mother is not educated and all his brothers didn't go to school also. So who does he look up to? His father is probably the one who would have asked him about his homework or maybe encouraged him to read a paper but he was never around. So even though his father is a Principle and very educated man, Eugene doesn't want to go to school. His father has now put him in my care to find a school in Medina and he will pay for the school so now football is the motivator. If he doesn't go to school I cannot let him play in the team. Everybody wants to play football and go pro⁷⁹.

The use of football as a means to encourage young people to engage with education as suggested in the quote above, surfaced on several occasions, and in many ways is a throwback to the Nkrumah era as discussed in the previous chapter. Susie Daniel and Tom Vernon of RtD both highlighted that the catalyst for starting the academy was to ensure good players, who often came from underprivileged backgrounds, were also able to also attain some

⁷⁸ Interview with Ben, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra

⁷⁹ Interview with Addae, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra

form of education⁸⁰. Similarly at Austin Texans FC and Future Icons FC, the owners were keen to stress the merits of education to the players. At Austin Texans FC for example, the owners would often promote the use of football and education as a means to perhaps obtain a sports scholarship abroad, using the appeal of migration to encourage the players to maintain a good academic record. The owner of the club also introduced a rule for all players at under-14 level, whereby they would have to maintain a C grade average to be picked for the team and attend training. At Future Icons FC, the owner would personally come and speak to the players once a week after training to stress the importance of attending school and obtaining a good education. This was not the case at Barracks FC, which despite its association with a 'charitable organisation' was more concerned with 'sport development' i.e. assisting those involved with a sport, such as administrators, coaches and players to strengthen the infrastructure and facilities within which an organized sport takes place (Kidd 2008).

Eugene's example also indicated that despite claims to the contrary, when an opportunity to attend senior secondary school arose, it was not necessarily accepted. The offer could be rebuffed and overlooked in preference of football, as was also the case at Barracks FC. A fundraising campaign enabled twenty-one academy players to enroll at a private senior secondary school, but only four attended regularly and the remaining seventeen were eventually expelled for absenteeism and disruptive behaviour. A rift occurred at the club, with verbal altercations exchanged between those allowed to remain and those asked to leave, with the latter complaining they wanted to return. Samson, one of the players allowed to stay, pleaded with the headmistress to reenroll his peers. When she agreed and he informed them at training, they retorted 'what do you want us to do there?'⁸¹ During conversations with the youth in question over the course of several training sessions, they eventually admitted using phrases to that effect when informed of their reinstatement.

One of the key complaints that emerged during these discussions was the duration between 'dropping out' and receiving the scholarships to recommence their formal education. The oversight that appeared to have been made when allocating the scholarships, was viewing age as an independent variable, a biological and temporal condition. Spaces that have

⁸⁰ Interview with Susie Daniell 12/04/2011- RtD and Interview with Tom Vernon 12/04/2011- RtD

⁸¹ Interview with Samson, Barracks FC 22/03/2011- Accra

associations with certain age groups influences who uses them, accordingly people have difference access to, and experiences of places on the grounds of their age (Hopkins & Pain 2007). This was particularly problematic in this situation, as Ghanaian football perfectly encapsulates and embodies the notion of age as a social construct rather than an independent variable. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the practice of falsifying player ages is prevalent in football, and it is common for an individual to have both a biological age and a constructed ‘football age’. Interestingly, this practice complies with contemporary literature in the social sciences that argues against the idea that young people, particularly those residing in the Global South, make a linear transition to adulthood and that it is a destination a person not only arrives at, but actively seeks to do so (Evans 2008; Jeffrey 2011; Johnson-Hanks 2002; Kelly 2001b; Langevang 2008). In the case of football, perpetual youth is desirable as it provides an individual with multiple opportunities to become a professional football player.

The aforementioned recipients of the scholarships all had football ages of seventeen years or younger, but biologically, most were over eighteen years old. Confidence was not in short supply on and around the football pitch, where they were considered highly talented players and most were on the verge of graduating to the senior team. The participants would probably disagree, but I would argue that to a certain extent this confidence was attributable to positive relational effects of age, which they were able to accrue by concocting an age that made their performances stand out in this particular space. This was not the case in the classroom. The discrepancy between their biological age and football age led to scenarios where twenty year olds were sharing English lessons with fifteen year olds. This became an acute source of embarrassment, and left them fearing intellectual emasculation. Phillip, one of the expelled students articulated this as follows.

‘If the teacher asks you to come to the front and you cannot read, the way you will see some small boy insulting you’⁸².

A minority also confessed, that on several occasions they failed to attend school because they ‘only’ had 1GHC to spend on ice-kenkey ⁸³ and some of the other male pupils had 3GHC. I will discuss the subject of wealth and masculinity below, but the point I want to make here is that the school

⁸² James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

⁸³ A meal traditionally prepared by boiling balls of mixed portions of fermented cooked maize meal and raw maize dough wrapped in cornhusk

became a place of potentially unlimited opportunities for humiliation. It is not being suggested that educational practitioners were unaware of the role played by age in shaping classroom dynamics. In fact, from the outset, it was suggested that those put forward for the scholarships were perhaps inappropriate precisely because of doubts concerning their biological age⁸⁴. But would the youth in question have preferred a different learning environment? Perhaps at one of the numerous private higher education colleges in Accra offering opportunities for people no longer of schooling age to obtain academic and or vocational qualifications. Kate Bannerman felt that preoccupation with the subject of age, and even to an extent familial circumstances, masked the crux of the matter at hand, a loss of faith in the value of formal education.

If they say they are not going to school because of money it is not really true but it is a nice excuse. If you go down to the beach you will see boys playing there but if you give them a uniform to go to school see how fast they will run. They just use it as an excuse because they think there is no future in schooling but there is in football. There are some who are genuine. There are some who want to work and study and you see they are coming from disadvantaged homes but they tried. Others you can tell they don't want to stay but when focused will make it. It is a good excuse but it is not really true⁸⁵.

When probed beyond their initial, often vociferous claims to want to attend school, all but one⁸⁶ of the seventeen Barracks FC players who were expelled ultimately admitted that education was no longer considered an avenue worth pursuing. This was the underlying reason behind their recent absenteeism and earlier decision to 'drop out' after junior secondary school. This also resonated with discussions and experiences garnered from interactions with players at Austin Texans FC and Future Icons FC. When Samson's peers replied 'what do you want us to do there?' they were on one level referring to the school in question, but it was also a shot of contempt towards, and indication of a deeper disillusionment with, the Ghanaian education system. Particularly its inability to equip them with the tools needed to improve their material situation and avoid unemployment both in the immediate present

⁸⁴ Interview with Damien, Barracks FC 19/04/2011- Accra and Interview with Kate Bannerman 22/04/2011- Accra

⁸⁵ Interview with Kate Bannerman 22/04/2011- Accra

⁸⁶ Nana was expelled following an altercation with a teacher. He claimed he acted in self-defense. His attendance and grades had been good up until this incident, and he was keen to continue his education either at the same school or elsewhere. James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

and foreseeable future. In raising this question, they were actually challenging a national dogma.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the belief that education is a prerequisite for individual social mobility and national development, is traceable to the 1960's post independence policies of Ghana's first President Kwame Nkrumah (Konadu-Agyemang 2000). This connection between development and education is attributable to the adoption of neo-classical perspectives that emerged during that era, particularly Schultz's (1961) 'human capital theory'. In contrast to unskilled individuals who remain at the mercy of others, those with sufficient human capital are able to take control of their own productivity and wealth creation. A lack of human capital could therefore be linked to instances of poverty. Schultz proposed that education be considered an investment in human capital, through which an income will be earned (see also Becker 1962; Becker 1993). Based on this logic, investment in human capital could play a pivotal role in Ghanaian poverty alleviation (Rolleston & Okech 2008), by equipping a person with the skills and capabilities to improve their material condition (Coleman 1988). The popularity of this premise resides in its ability to present a path from educational inputs to economic outputs and societal development in the form of increased labour power in the employment market, and subsequent wages leading to improvements in material conditions. Following independence the economic rationales for educational investment and expansion continue to be prominent in Ghanaian and international developmental policy, yet several decades of military coups and political instability following independence, hindered effective policy implementation until reforms were introduced in 1987 (Rolleston & Okech 2008).

In many ways the reforms that were introduced ran counter to the standard SAP protocol, as they increased the duration of mandatory schooling to nine years (six years primary school and three years in junior secondary). The reforms were the precursor to the 1996 'free compulsory universal basic education (FCUBE)' program. The FCUBE initiative was part of the Ghanaian government's broader outline for development as stated in the 'Vision 2020' document⁸⁷. It openly declared the states commitment to 'enhancing human capacities through the education and training of all citizens in order to reduce the level and incidence of poverty, increase employment opportunities, and ensure real increases in individual and national incomes' (GoG, 1997 cited in Rolleston & Okech 2008, p.321). Additionally, the reforms were particularly

⁸⁷ Interview with Kate Bannerman 22/04/2011- Accra

keen to remedy what was perceived as an inadequate link between education and employment, through ‘increased investment in human capital to increase labour productivity’ (GoG,1997 cited in Rolleston & Okech 2008, p.324). The strategy implicitly contains a sedentary bias, designed to encourage and enable Ghanaians to achieve a better life at ‘home’ in an attempt to counter the ‘brain drain’ where highly educated and skilled citizens migrate to other countries. This trend became particularly pronounced during the 1980’s, a period marking Ghana’s transition from a net immigration to a net emigration country (Bakewell & De Haas 2007). The aim of this chapter is not to determine whether the approach taken by the Ghanaian government is the correct one, but it was apparent during my time in Accra that the rationale for an education-social mobility and economic growth link did not correspond with the everyday realities of participants.

A lack of employment opportunities alongside an increasing supply of educated labour has deflated both the economic and symbolic value of education. This is partly attributable to the simultaneity of broader educational provision in conjunction with falling labour demands in the aftermath of structural adjustment retrenchment. This left large numbers of public sector workers and civil servants (predominantly male) jobless, and removed a key employer of educated workers (Chant & Jones 2005; Konadu-Agyemang 2000; Langevang & Gough 2009; Osei 2004; Overa 2007). As participants did not emphasize or articulate these broader socio-historical factors, I do not want to dwell on them. Rather, for them, the issue of employment insecurity was more closely associated with an intuition that the supply of educated young people in Accra had exceeded the point of healthy competition. I lost count of stories recounting the plight of a cousin or family friend who had completed their tertiary education, but was now either unemployed, or being poorly paid in the job they were eventually able to procure. This perception is corroborated by research that has observed a general decline in Ghanaian wage differentials since 1991, resulting in ‘qualification inflation’ as employers select from a wider pool of educated labour (Rolleston & Okech 2008). In light of the strategy adopted in the ‘Vision 2020’ development plan, this situation is clearly problematic, because according to the neo-classical human capital perspective upon which it is founded, educational decisions are economic decisions. Individuals compare the sum of discounted future incomes resulting from education, with their costs in terms of fees and foregone earnings.

In a context where the supply of educated labour exceeds demand, as appears to be the case in Accra, the ensuing ‘qualification inflation’ fuels the

perception that returns from education are in decline or insufficient. David, one of the four players at Barracks FC who chose to attend senior secondary school having been provided with a scholarship, highlighted this point when discussing the situation of his peers who were expelled.

They don't care if you agree to pay their school fees for ten years, they just couldn't see serious bread [money] coming so eventually they started dropping [out of school]⁸⁸

What emerges is an ambivalent relationship with education that is relational/relative to age. On one hand, the symbolic value and social standing attached to attending school as part of an anticipated and respectable adulthood still lingers, particularly amongst children. While on the other, the economic and symbolic value of education is diminishing amongst youth. Older participants, particularly those in the under-17 and senior teams, frequently made the point that as they grew older it became increasingly apparent that formal labour markets were rarely, if ever, accessed as a result of completing ones tertiary education. The primary concern amongst these youth centered on the perception that the 'serious jobs' they initially envisioned obtaining (ranging from lawyer to 'at a ministry' i.e. clerical and public service employment positions) were in short supply, making them increasingly difficult for school leavers and even university graduates to secure. A secondary concern was an inability to generate contacts beyond their immediate social circle. It was argued that a frequent combination of these two concerns left them simultaneously stranded on the periphery of the formal economy, susceptible to nepotistic practices within it, and increasingly likely to join the majority of their fellow Ghanaians working in the informal economy.

5.3 Living the X-Way

The gendered dynamics of informal labour, particularly market trading, became increasingly apparent. This is in contrast to other African countries (particularly those situated in the south and east), where it has been argued that structural adjustment reconfigured patriarchal norms by pressurizing women to assist in household reproduction through paid income. Ghanaian women have a long historical association with employment, especially informal labour activities (Amponsah et al. 1996; Grieco et al. 1996; Grieco et al. 1995; Meagher 2010; Overa 2007; Turner & Fouracre 1995; Turner 1996). I am not suggesting that Ghanaian society does not subscribe to a number of

⁸⁸ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

patriarchal features, or that in many social domains males do not occupy a dominant social position in comparison to females, because such a claim would be nonsensical (Adinkrah 2010). The point I seek to make here is that as suggested below by Kate Bannerman, the informal economy is not one of those domains.

Women in Africa are more powerful than people realize, not just financially but in the greater society. Here in Ghana it is the women who make the money and it is also the women who take care of the house. It is mainly women that are into this retail business and have been for sometime, they are now the ones earning, of course they often say ‘we don’t have money we don’t have money’, but in most cases it is the woman who is taking care of the house⁸⁹.

Ghanaian women have and still do enjoy social recognition and political influence based upon their enterprise as both small and large-scale traders, however a consequence of neoliberal reform and the collapse of the previously male dominated formal public sector, is ‘overcrowding’ in the informal labour market (Grieco et al. 1996; Grieco et al. 1995; Overa 2007). The generally unemployed, rural to urban migrants and school leavers of both genders all seek employment in what is still considered the economic forte of females (Overa 2007). This was not an acceptable prospect for male youth at the three clubs, who are aware that ‘masculinity is simultaneously a place within gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender relations, and the effects of those practices in bodily experience, personality and culture’ (Connell 2005, p.71).

The young people I encountered at the clubs were not aspiring to just any kind of adulthood, but ‘serious jobs’ entailing respect and authority, ideally situated within the formal and or other associated masculine sphere of employment. Kwesi, an under-14 player at Future Icons FC indicated this point during an exchange with his teammate, when he asked ‘so a boy who finishes schooling then works like *kayaye*⁹⁰ is better than the boy who didn’t go [to school], are you sure? (Laughs) you dey touch (are you crazy?)!’⁹¹. Cultural meanings do not restrict themselves to the mind, they influence conduct and reveal themselves through the organization and regulation of social practices (Carrington 2002; Hall 1997). Previous research conducted in Ghana has touched upon the role of gender relations and the act of ‘dropping

⁸⁹ Interview with Kate Bannerman 22/04/2011- Accra

⁹⁰ The term *Kayaye* refers to young often-uneducated female migrants from the northern region of Ghana. They are frequently seen in Accra carrying various food and hardware items on their heads, see also Oberhauser & Yeboah (2011)

⁹¹ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Future Icons FC

out', mainly in relation to patriarchal norms. Household responsibilities are found to be organized along sex lines, and unlike their male counterparts, female household members of schooling age are usually asked to assist with 'homemaking' often to the detriment of their education (Chant & Jones 2005). While I would not dispute the general tenets of these findings, their portrayal of gender norms fails to adequately theorize differences in relations between *and within* genders, as alluded to by Kwesi. This prevents a more critical analysis that takes into consideration that similarly to other parts of the world, heterogeneity within African countries means that 'not all men have the same amount or type of power, the same opportunities and consequently the same life trajectories' (Ouzgane & Morrell 2005, p.12).

Ghanaian society places high expectations and tremendous pressure on young Ghanaian men to be successful in material terms, reproducing a sense of monetary success as an inherently masculine trait. Daniel, a senior team player and coach for Future Icons FC's under-17 team, succinctly articulated this point.

In Ghana we have this proverb that 'what shows you're a man is your pockets' (laughs). It isn't what shows you're a man is your degree (laughs)⁹².

Ven der Geest's (1997) assertion that 'respect is bestowed primarily upon those who have turned their life into a success, and the most convincing proof of a successful life is money' (cited in Langevang 2008, p.2044) is highly prescient here, with the addition of a gender dimension. The modern professional football player encapsulates this perception, as Kwabena from Future Icons FC explained.

If you are talking about the famous person in Ghana at the moment it is not the president it is Baby Jet, Asamoah Gyan (Sunderland AFC). They (footballers) are the men at the moment. Look at Essien (Chelsea FC), he comes back to Ghana and he is spending big. He can take care of his family and we this generation we want to go out and get money and look after our parents. Kobby you should see them when pre season comes, they will come to Ghana and drive Wabenzy (Mercedes Benz) and Cocaine Benz (Hummer Jeep). Now other people may drive Wabenzy but the footballers will have number plate so you know [who they are] and kids will run and follow the car just to get a glimpse of the player because he has the fame. At times players even when they come to Ghana they will go to buy something and the person will just tell them 'no no take take', so they have so many advantages. But we also

⁹² Interview with Daniel, Future Icons FC 24/02/2011- Accra

want to live the 'X-Way' (extraordinary) we don't want to just struggle⁹³.

As discussed in the literature review, 'hegemonic masculinity' is deemed to exemplify the most revered way of being a man, while obliging all other men to situate themselves in relation to it, consequently connecting the relations within and between genders (Connell 2005). This often maintains and reinforces patriarchal gender norms, but also allows for the dominance of other forms of subordinated, complicit and marginalized masculinities (Connell 2005). I would argue that one of the underlying causes of the disparity in drop out rates between young males from the poorest and wealthiest quintiles mentioned above, is the prevalence of a social context in which a respectable masculine identity is associated with wealth. A 'Dada-ba'⁹⁴ is likely to dine at Frankie's amongst Western expatriates, shop in Accra Mall, have access to cars, designer clothing, vacations abroad, and other symbols of economic virility available to them. Thus while emasculation may occur in other aspects of their life, they hold a symbolic and material advantage over their financially constrained peers. They embody living the 'X Way'. This becomes increasingly apparent by junior and senior high school when income inequalities are likely to become more noticeable, particularly for those moving from local public schools to socioeconomically diverse private ones⁹⁵. The embarrassment that arose from *only* having 1GHC for ice kenkey makes more sense when framed within this context. It is clearly not in keeping with the 'X Way' of living, and importantly, it is not keeping with the hegemonic ideal of masculinity associated with a footballer's lifestyle that these youth aspire to emulate.

It is not only in the classroom that disparities in socioeconomic conditions materialize. As I traversed Accra and became familiar with its geography, the salience of Ferguson's claim that in contrast to the colonial era a first class lifestyle is no longer restricted to Western expatriates, was strikingly apparent. The problematization of liberal welfare governance not only leaves individuals and families responsible for welfare provision, individuals are increasingly compelled to assume the role of makers of their own 'livelihood mediated by the market as well as their biographical planning and organization' (Beck 1992, pg.130). Thus although a noticeable local elite who have been able to attain wealth in contemporary neoliberal Ghana exists,

⁹³ Interview with Kwabena, Future Icons FC 26/02/2011- Accra

⁹⁴ Dada-ba literally means 'fathers child', a term sometimes used to describe a spoilt male youth from an affluent family

⁹⁵ Messner (1989) observed a similar situation in the USA

contrary to early post independence Ghana, the financially secure and affluent are not deemed indicative of an impending generalized societal condition⁹⁶. An example of this was evident at Future Icons FC, which was overlooked by recently developed mansions. The mansions provided a sharp contrast to the condition of the pitch and living conditions of the players.



Fig 16: Mansions in the background- living the 'X-Way'

Ferguson's assertion 'that contemporary success stories are more likely to be seen as proving the power, *not of education and developmental uplift*, but of luck, ruthlessness, or even criminality (emphasis added 2006, p.187), is also highly significant. As Kate Bannerman notes below, this is a crucial factor in the decision to 'drop out' upon reaching the vital juncture outlined above, as youth already disillusioned with the merits of education, are increasingly aware of football related success stories.

KB- Well originally in Ghana football was mainly for vagabonds and street boys, so that any parent at all who has a child playing football was considered a disadvantaged person who cannot academically make it. That was the perception. We had something called gutter to gutter and you know they normally played the football on the street. There is a gutter here and one over there and you played between.

⁹⁶ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA and Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

JE- I remember coming to Accra in the early nineties to visit my grandmother and I was playing football with some boys and she called me inside and stopped me.

KB- Yes exactly because football was seen as being meant for vagabonds or those who could not go to school. So if you are to study the situation very well and I am zeroing in on Ghana, the very first batch of people who actually made it in the football world they were not very well educated. But around say 1990 some of them started coming back home in grand style, you saw somebody on the street before and now he is acting like he has made it. The blow it started doing to the education of those people is that this told them if you cannot go to school you can make it in football⁹⁷.

This situation reinforced a long-standing perception in Ghanaian society that the best football players come from low-income families and amongst the *koboloi*, as Jordan Anagblah of the GFA explains below.

It is a trend that you will find in the whole of West Africa, that good footballers did not go to school. Those who don't have good parents and come from poor homes are the people who have the chance to be on the streets everyday playing football. A very good footballer therefore often did not go to school ⁹⁸.

I am aware that correlation does not equal causation, but it is highly probable that post SAP neoliberal reforms and the ensuing formative period of 'qualification inflation', coinciding with what is considered the watershed era of both regular and irregular Ghanaian football migration (the post 1990 emergence of FIFA youth tournaments highlighted in Chapter 4) are related. As indicated in the dialogue below with the owner of Austin Texans FC, a career in professional football now appears to not only allow male youth in Accra to circumvent an education system leading them towards unemployment or unsatisfactory employment, it also provides them with an opportunity to live how a young Ghanaian male should, the 'X Way'.

AA- So now as a young kid in junior high you know people are politicians, doctors and lawyers but ask yourself who are living the most glamorous lives? It is the sports star. This guy was one of us just walking around the neighborhood with the same shorts who didn't have money for food and lived in an apartment with a leaky roof. All of a sudden because he got the chance to go to Europe, now he has moved his mother out of the neighborhood, bought a car for his brother and uncle. Oh, why don't I also become a footballer? Maybe his uncle wants to pay for him to go to a technical school to become a mechanic or engineer but

⁹⁷ Interview with Kate Bannerman 22/04/2011- Accra

⁹⁸ Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

no he sees that as rubbish.

JE- It's not the 'X-Way'

AA- Exactly you understand, so you see the problem. The deciding factor is that they have seen what Essien (Chelsea FC) can do. Essien didn't have a degree neither does Asamoah Gyan (Sunderland FC) or Derek Boateng (AFC Getafe). So it is the same dream and that is why the boys play on the pitch we have and they keep coming to training everyday.

JE- Who have they actually seen make it in football?

AA- Here in Medina Prince Tagoe (Hoffenheim) he made it. He played on the same pitch so they have seen him go through the ranks. Vorsar (Hoffenheim) came from the same neighborhood. It is the dream and they are looking up to us to get them a contract somewhere so that one day they can secure a contract outside or play on the national team ⁹⁹.

It is however one thing to propose that you are dropping out of school to become a professional football player because you have seen others do so, and quite another entirely to think you are actually capable of achieving this feat. So why do increasing numbers of male youth in Accra think they are capable of *becoming* professional football players?

5.4 A commodity or Entrepreneur of Self?

This chapter has thus far focused primarily on the world of Accra that exists beyond football, and has sought to discuss the socioeconomic context within which young males in Accra decide to pursue a career in professional football. The question as to why male youth in Accra think they are capable of becoming professional football players, is of course dependent on understanding who or what they think they are becoming. What is a footballer? Brackenridge suggests that a young person involved in professional football is simultaneously a 'worker, a unit of labour, and a commodity, to be traded in multinational markets' (ibid 2010, p.3). Neoliberal capitalism's model of exchange and value extends itself to include the individual, in this case a football player, facilitating what appears to be a commodification of self. This description reflects that as part of this system of exchange and value, football players are employees of, owned by and traded between clubs for a fee. They therefore resemble the Marxist interpretation of a commodity, in that they are produced and offered for sale within a capitalist mode of production (Appadurai 1994). Adopting this analytical perspective allows us to reconcile a concern for the spatial distribution of production and

⁹⁹ Interview with Addae Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra

exchange (consumption is under theorized) with a social and organizational configuration of labour. This enables the recognition of relationships between actors at key institutional nodes in the football political economy, through for example a commodity chain analysis as adopted by Poli (2005).

African football and its associated migratory patterns are primarily associated with a production dominated Marxist theorisation, often producing 'an exclusive economic, mechanic and linear process of a value-added input and output chain', which ignores non-economic relations' (Poli 2005, p.6). I agree with Poli's concern that the term commodity is inadequate, as it fails to recognise that unlike typical commodities, a key peculiarity of this situation is the humanity of the commodity in question. Alternatively, even when non-economic relations are implored, it often gives rise to a discourse of neo-colonial exploitation (Bale 2004; Darby 2007; Lanfranchi & Taylor 2001). We again see the influence of Marx, as drawing on dependency and world systems literature this process is argued to involve the sourcing, refinement and export of raw materials (African football players), for consumption and wealth generation in the European core, inducing impoverishment of the African periphery (Darby 2007). Dependency and world-system theories are appealing in their ability to illustrate a general picture of the political economy, and logic underlying the migration patterns of African football players to Europe and beyond. Yet this sheds no light on the interconnected simultaneity inherent in the process of being a worker, raw material, a unit of labour and commodity.

In order to conceptualise why male youth in Accra opt to, and think they can become professional football players, I propose that we relocate our reference point away from structural and economic analysis fixated with modes of production and exchange. Influenced by Bourdieu (1989), my basis for doing so acknowledges that the social structures highlighted by pushing aside the subjective representations of these male African youth, do influence the latter's practices by establishing constraints and prescribing possible paths. Yet these representations and the mental structures that underpin them must also be taken into account, because as this chapter has shown, they inform how these young people understand, react to or transform their situation. Similarly, Foucault (2008) suggests that in order to understand labour we must adopt the position of the worker, and not present them in our analysis as merely an object of supply and demand in the form of labour power. These young men are not merely objects of supply and demand in the form of a commodity, raw material, or unit of labour power in the football industry. They are active subjects cognisant of, and engaging with

socioeconomic contexts. Accordingly, we should try to understand from their perspective, what a professional football player is, and why they think they can become one.

This position brings us back to Schultz's proposition that in contrast to unskilled individuals who remain at the mercy of others, those with sufficient human capital are able to take control of their own productivity and wealth creation. The decision to 'drop out' and pursue a career in professional football is not a dismissal of the basic logic of human capital theory, or investing in oneself to obtain an income. It is a dismissal of government and developmental institutions narrow interpretations, which run counter to neo-liberal logic. The latter emphasizes that educational investment is much broader than schooling, and that many more elements are involved in the formation of appropriate human capital (Foucault 2008), which I would also add is relational to the temporal and spatial milieu in which the person resides. The crucial issue for these male youth is deciding what form this investment should take, as opposed to limiting themselves to society's default option of education. Accordingly, in a context where educational investment is considered to be superfluous, as indicated above, these male youth are reconfiguring the education (school)-social mobility link so widely promulgated in Ghana, and replacing education with football. These male youth concur that in contrast to unskilled individuals who remain at the mercy of others, those with appropriate human capital are able to take control of their own productivity and wealth creation. Herbert Adika of the GFA made a similar point when he stated.

I am not saying that involving themselves in this football business is the best but schooling is a difficult one and it is very very difficult because it takes concentration to get to the top. Now with football it is just as difficult but the secret is that to them [male Ghanaian youth] it *seems* an easier way to make money. If you want to be a doctor look at the process, if you want to be a lawyer look at the process. But if you want to be a footballer, if you are able to get the basic rudiments and encouragement, especially if you have some talent, then with luck you can make it and earn something (emphasis added)¹⁰⁰.

If income in the form of wages is a return on human capital investment, (consisting of the physical and psychological attributes that enable a person to earn remuneration i.e. both innate and acquired attributes), then human capital becomes both that which makes a future possible income through a wage and inseparable from the person who

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

possesses it (Foucault 2008). To that extent it is not like other forms of capital, nor a conception of labour power, rather it is a notion of capital ability. Neoliberal capitalism's model of exchange and value extends itself to include the individual, but not as a partner of exchange facilitating a commodification of self, as for example celebrity theorists propose, rather the individual becomes an enterprise. The holder of appropriate human capital is not only able to acquire a wage, but becomes 'an entrepreneur of self, being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of his earnings' (Foucault 2008). For these male youth, the footballer living the X-Way is the embodiment of this philosophy. Richard, an under-seventeen player at Future Icons FC highlights this point below.

The under-twenty national team that won in Egypt were all given a Toyota Corolla, even the managers and officials just for playing football. If someone goes to the hospital and he is just about to die and the doctor saves him I don't think the government will give him car, but someone who plays football to get an opportunity for himself is given a car? So many of us stop and we think, before you become a doctor you have to pursue a degree and buy books and struggle struggle struggle but football I get some boots, some kit and I can become a footballer and earn for myself¹⁰¹.

A key reason why football seems easier and is more attractive than pursuing other vocations, is linked to ideas surrounding innate physical attributes and rests upon the supposedly latent potential of black West African males sporting bodily capital. The belief that black West African men are physically predestined to excel in football, a form of palatable racism, is now ubiquitous in Accra. As highlighted in the literature review chapter, although once considered a natural hierarchical framework of difference among human beings (Winant 2006), it is now accepted that contemporary racial categories are relatively recent spatial and temporally specific ideological constructions (Back & Solomos 2009; Gilroy 1998; Malik 1996; Miles 2009; Saldanha 2006; Young 1995). Consequently, race is now frequently understood and conceptualized as a discursive category that refers to the cultural representation of people, rather than the actuality of the people themselves (Back & Solomos 2009; Saldanha 2006; Slocum 2008; Miles 2009). As noted by Nayak, when viewed from this position, it could be argued that there is 'no such thing as race' (2006, p.411). However, as will be discussed in the next chapter, when viewed from the position of aspirant Ghanaian migrants in the football industry, race is not merely a social

¹⁰¹ Interview with Richard, Future Icons FC 02/04/2011- Accra

construct. It has a clear and identifiable materiality, a materiality that is potentially beneficial to, and instrumental in, successfully securing a professional football contract and living the X-Way.

5.5 Conclusion

Using Accra, Ghana as a case study, this chapter sought to understand why male West African youth are more disposed to prioritizing a career in professional football. I began by highlighting how, male youth at all three clubs initially claimed that the spiraling cost of privatized education had forced them to 'drop out' out of school, during the transition from junior to senior secondary school. Turning to a career in professional football at this vital conjuncture, was the unfortunate outcome of their socioeconomic situation, and they were keen to continue their education later. This situation, at least on the surface, appeared to corroborate Jeffrey's (2010) claim that the opportunity to enter pre-tertiary education is no longer the central problem for children and youth in many parts of the Global South. Instead, it is remaining present in school as they grapple with the privatisation of education. However, despite often-enthusiastic claims that they were keen to attend school, the disjuncture between their words and actions began to unravel. In a context where the supply of educated labour exceeds demand, as appears to be the case in contemporary Accra, a perception of 'qualification inflation' has promulgated the belief that returns from education are in decline or insufficient. The belief that education is a prerequisite for individual social mobility and national development has lost credibility.

Ghanaian society places high expectations and tremendous pressure on young males to be successful in material terms, reproducing a sense of monetary success as an inherently masculine trait. Therefore the youth at all three clubs were not aspiring to just any kind of adulthood, but 'serious jobs' entailing respect and authority, ideally situated within the formal and or other associated masculine sphere of employment. The dialectic of subjective hope and objective chances imprints definitions of the impossible and possible upon them. They are aware of objective influences and combine these with preconceived subjective notions of personal limitations. From this they are able to translate a future they believe to be tailor made for them, one that does not involve joining the masses in the feminized domain of informal employment. Accordingly, when positioned in the midst of this particular vital conjuncture, they appraised both the potential and the limitations of their spatial location, evaluated where and with whom prospects seemed better (see also Langevang 2008), but also, crucially, how they can create

opportunities to enable them to live their desired masculine lifestyle.

A career in professional football is now deemed not only to allow these male youth to circumvent an education system believed to lead to either unemployment or unsatisfactory employment. It also provides them with an opportunity to engage in conspicuous consumption and live how a young Ghanaian male should, the 'X Way'. However, in order to further conceptualise why male youth think they can become professional football players, I proposed that we relocate our reference point away from structural and economic analysis fixated with capitalist modes of production and exchange. My rationale for doing so was two fold, firstly; these perspectives inconsistently suggest that a footballer player is simultaneously a worker, raw material, a unit of labour and a commodity, but fails to theorize how this is possible. Secondly, these young males (like all human footballer players) are not merely objects of supply and demand they are active subjects cognisant of, and engaging with socioeconomic contexts.

To overcome this theoretical quandary, it is argued that within the football industry, neoliberal capitalism's model of exchange and value extends itself to include the individual, but this does not instigate a commodification of self as for example celebrity theorists propose, rather the individual becomes an enterprise, an entrepreneur of self. For these male youth, the black West African professional football player, who is able to draw upon his latent sporting bodily capital to procure a move 'outside' to the West and live the 'X-Way', is the embodiment of this philosophy. The following chapter turns to the subject of procuring a move 'outside', and how 'making it' in professional football is perhaps not as easy as it seems.

6.0 Never let your boots leave your eyes: Managing uncertainty within football migration



Fig 17: Discarded Dreams

6.1 Introduction

Having previously visited Accra on several occasions for reasons unrelated to this research, I was already somewhat aware of the popularity of European and non domestic football amongst Ghanaians. At the time this was merely a passing observation, however while undertaking my fieldwork for this study and applying a more critical perspective, the salience of GFA executive Herbert Adika's assertion that 'the popularity of the European game here is so strong it is driving them crazy'¹⁰² gained credence. Beyond the confines of a stadium you are more likely to bump into an elephant than an Accra resident wearing a local team's jersey. This is despite the capital being home to Accra Hearts of Oak, one of Ghana's most successful clubs both domestically and continentally. It is in this externally orientated atmosphere that budding Ghanaians keen to emulate their sporting heroes look 'to 'go outside' in search of a professional career in the game' (emphasis in original Darby 2010, p.22). As highlighted in the literature review, the increasing prevalence of West African football players (especially youths) migrating to Europe, has led FIFA, CAF and NGOs to propose that overcoming the 'culture of mediocrity', i.e. a propensity towards clientism, trickery and corruption pervading professional football in West Africa, will encourage young talented players to remain in their country of origin.

It would be disingenuous to suggest that West Africa's footballing infrastructure is not influencing the desire to migrate. Yet the growing number of players found in the Middle East and Asia as opposed to Europe (see Poli 2010), for example in Bengal (see Mukharji 2008), India and Pakistan¹⁰³ is testament to a more complex picture than drawn in top-heavy determinist accounts. Moreover, in the introduction to this thesis I highlighted how an estimated seventy Ghanaian players were recently found 'stranded in Mauritius following a scam' (Coe & Wiser 2011), a country not particularly well known for its footballing infrastructure. Interestingly, Poli (2008) noted a strong correlation between GDP per capita and the average age of African players in Europe. The lower the GDP of the origin country, the younger their players are found to leave. This indicates that migration is somehow also linked to the broader socioeconomic situation of the country of departure, not just its footballing infrastructure. I tackle this topic later, but before doing so, this chapter addresses the 'culture of mediocrity' view. Influenced by theoretical approaches seeking to 'escape the analytical cul-de-

¹⁰² Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

¹⁰³ Interview with Anthony Baffoe 10/04/2011- PFAG

sac' of viewing migrants as objects or victims of migration regimes (Anderson & Ruhs 2010), I take the subjectivities of both migrants and prospective migrants as the reference point for the ensuing discussion. I ask how if at all irregular migration emerges from the footballing milieu?

Following on from findings in the two preceding chapters, the first part of this chapter depicts the footballing context in which aspirant Ghanaian youth seek to ply their trade. I highlight how the majority of Ghanaian footballers now look to play 'outside'. On the surface this would appear to corroborate the 'culture of mediocrity' view. Influenced by literature on social navigation (Langevang 2008; Simone 2005; Vigh 2010; Waage 2006), causality in Sub-Saharan Africa (Geschiere & Roitman 1997; Meyer 1998; Parish 2000) and feminist material scholarship (Grosz 1994; Slocum 2008; Saldanha 2006), the second part of the chapter discusses how this environment coalesces with the subjectivities and subsequent actions of the players. The point I seek to make in this chapter is not that male Ghanaian youth are unable to understand the migratory process, or that they are passive victims. The issue is that they are faced with the challenge of trying to control their destiny within what is an inherently unpredictable and saturated industry. Consequently, a sense of uncertainty surrounds the quest to become a professional football player and migrate 'outside'. It is this uncertainty, which is a product of, but not tantamount to the 'culture of mediocrity' that influences migratory practices. However, by performing certain rituals and practices they are able to gain a sense of autonomy within the process.

6.2 Justifying your inclusion

In the previous chapter, I highlighted how male youth in Accra are 'dropping out' of the education system during the transition from junior to senior secondary school to become footballers. A career in professional football not only provides an opportunity to live how a young Ghanaian male should- the 'X Way'- by circumventing an education system predicted to lead towards unemployment or unsatisfactory employment, it is also a profession strongly associated with spatial mobility. Thus in contrast to the earlier state-governed era of 'developmental football' touched upon in Chapter 4, Kurt Okraku, secretary of the Ghana League Clubs Association (GHALCA) articulated the zeitgeist of Ghanaian football in the comment below. When he highlighted how the aim now is to leave Ghana.

You will find that every player has the mentality that they want to play outside of Ghana that is the first and biggest thing. Whether they can go and perform that is another issue all together. But the belief is that they must play outside of Ghana. They want to go and make money, they want to come back and drive around in the flashy cars¹⁰⁴

A key factor in the drive towards professionalism and a businesslike approach to the game mentioned above was the retention of talented players, to whom TV and sponsorship revenues are tied. As noted by Anthony Baffoe, ‘TV rights are sold for huge amounts of money but at the end of the day it is all because of the players and the players quality’¹⁰⁵. Problematically, the average monthly salary for professional football players in Ghana is relatively low, particularly in comparison to players at European football clubs, where a handful of players in the English Premier League for example are known to earn £250,000 per week, and in some cases more. In Ghana, the monthly salaries range from 50GHC to 500GHC, however the vast majority earn less than 200GHC- if they are paid at all. Anthony Baffoe explained how this situation was leading Ghanaian players to emigrate, including to countries not traditionally known for their footballing infrastructure.

TB- TV rights are sold for huge amounts of money but locally the players are not really making any benefit out of it and that is why everybody rushes to go. There are players playing in India and Bangladesh and Pakistan. It sounds crazy like I am exaggerating?

JE- No I have read about this happening

TB- You can't say that it is because they play a higher standard of football there than here. You see? It is just because they are able to pay the players a certain amount of money. We must be capable of also having a standard or minimum salary for the players, this is very very important. This is one of the reasons I set up the PFAG and these are some of the things we have to work on¹⁰⁶

So what went wrong? Why did professionalization along neoliberal lines that was supposed to reinvigorate African domestic football result in such a dramatic divergence in opportunities/returns, and an exodus of players from Ghana and other African countries more generally? A considerable lobby comprising leading figures from within FIFA, CAF, human rights groups and sections of the liberal European press, propose that the issue lies in the underdevelopment of the African football political economy, and overcoming

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Kurt Okraku 14/02/2011- GHALCA

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Anthony Baffoe 10/04/2011- PFAG

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Anthony Baffoe 10/04/2011- PFAG

its 'culture of mediocrity'. By doing so it is argued that the football environment will improve, and thus encourage players to stay at home, therefore limiting the supply of prospective migrants. The exploitative practices of European clubs and agents at the level of the individual migrant player will then also cease, as the attractiveness of African players e.g. wage dumping will diminish, creating less demand. Consequently the problem of all forms of football migration would be solved, and many Ghanaians now share similar sentiments. Interestingly, these discourses share similarities with the 'criminalisation thesis' (Bayart et al. 1999) used to explain the alleged failures and inadequacies of African states. They argue that African social networks and informal economies undermine rational economic institutions, as the former are underpinned by dishonest cultural predispositions, a lack of separation between private and public spheres and a validation of cunning (cf Meagher 2005). Similarly, Ghanaian football is deemed incapable of developing an economically effective political economy due to intrinsic dysfunctional 'cultural repertoires', namely a propensity towards clientism, trickery and corruption. While in Accra I did indeed witness reference to, and examples of these practices. On the topic of clientism, Kurt Okraku stated

The systems don't really work like it works in Europe it is very difficult. I hope you understand what I am saying? There is a lack of human resource I mean the quality is simply not there. People in football have still not come to accept that football is science and that it is not about who is my friend who is my brother or who is my sister, it is about who has the capacity to deliver. Until we accept this philosophy things will never change. People aren't accepting this fact that football is science and this affects everything, it effects decision making, it effects organization, it affects the intangible assets, it affects everything¹⁰⁷.

It is not only at the executive level that such issues were touched upon. During what began as a casual discussion after training with under-17 players at Barracks FC regarding their career aspirations, I was informed by several players, - who became increasingly aggrieved as the conversation escalated- that one of the biggest obstacles to footballing success in Ghana is endemic corruption. They described how young players are exposed to corrupt practices e.g. 'refreshing' (bribing) referees to fix results and avoid relegation, forging player registration documents (discussed below) and paying embassy officials to change passport details. It was also explained that it is particularly with regards to migration that above mentioned 'Big Men' are able to use their

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Kurt Okraku 14/02/2011- GHALCA

financial influence, and political might to manipulate team selection, and ensure that their players gain the much-coveted international exposure in FIFA youth tournaments. All of this increases the chance of the player gaining a lucrative transfer overseas¹⁰⁸. Nana, one of the under-17 players, explained how he and three others were selected to play for the Ghanaian under-20 team, but when the squad list for the tournament was declared their names had been omitted. The team manager duly investigated, only to find that this was not due to a dip in their performances or an administrative error, but for failing to make a payment to the appropriate officials.

When I went to meet the former [REDACTED] he told me straight away 'if you want your keeper to be in the post you need to put the right envelope on the right desk'. That is the [REDACTED] of the FA telling me this. The problem is everybody is doing it and it is from the top all the way down¹⁰⁹.

One of the most obvious examples of 'trickery' that I came across was the practice of age falsification, linked to player registration cards. Although this is not unique to Ghana or even the sport of football, the manner in which it occurs is context specific. The following exchanges with Evans Amenumey¹¹⁰, a GFA executive who shall remain anonymous, and Damien (manager of Barracks FC) respectively, explains how the registration card works in Ghana, but also how attempts are made to abuse the system. Firstly, Evans Amenumey describes changes to how registration cards are processed.

EA- We always had registration cards but before we had been using height to select under-fourteen because before we didn't have under-twelve that came around 1994. But then around 99, around that place we introduced the scaling system of weight, you have to stand on the scale so it is 35kg for under-twelve, 45kg for under-fourteen and 60kg for under-seventeen. If you are able to make that you can play that age. If you are under-twelve and you are maybe nine years or ten years and from having good nutrition because you have a good home and eat good food, maybe you are bigger you play under-fourteen. That is how we go about it.

JE- Do people try to cheat the system?

EA- Oh yes a lot of lies but that is how it is, so you have to be careful. They will normally be caught because the referee will inspect the cards before the game. So the younger boys can play up but the fourteen cannot play down in the twelve. When you play two years you have to check the

¹⁰⁸ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Damien, Barracks FC 19/04/2011- Accra

¹¹⁰ Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

registration again and graduate to fourteen. From fourteen to seventeen you have three years then you can graduate and go to the division.

JE- So you use the same card all the way through?

EA- Yes it graduates and you place a new picture and club details, so this is the card you will take to the division. When you get there they will change it for you. When you get to division, you have to take this card for your transfer. Without this card you cannot play division unless you didn't play any match at all and you go there straight. But even then people will challenge it 'oh ah but this man I know him, he played for this team before', so if you don't take care you will have a problem.

Secondly, a different GFA executive (who shall remain anonymous) stated that despite the efforts of GFA staff, particularly at Colts level, to curtail the practice of age falsification, it was now widespread in Ghanaian football.

You are a Ghanaian which is why I am telling you this. We are falsifying ages and nobody is prepared to say anything because it is all of them it is from the top. This under-twenty and under-twenty three you see are all people beyond twenty or even twenty-four but we say they are twenty three or nineteen and use them. That is why we were able to take the world cup about twice, I have forgotten how many times and we came to third and second place or so. If they go to the world cup and come back they are transferred and the club get money so the authorities and the officials says yes because all of them are involved in that game

It was when they decided playing this FIFA under-seventeen and under-twenty, instead of the authorities coming down to the Colts, they decided using the older boys in the Premier and division and abusing their ages. There are some checks and balances and if they maintain it, you will get the true ages in Colts. But immediately when they are above our area, and lets say they join the third division the second division or the premier they will give them another age. So when the person is twenty they give him seventeen, when he is twenty-two they give him seventeen, wanting him to play in the under twenty national team¹¹¹.

On the issue of age falsification, the manager of Barracks FC¹¹² also explained that the practice was common.

It's not hard to cheat the system they just use somebody else's weight. A small kid goes and stands on the scale but he is there pretending to be someone else. He will go to the registration, he will go on the scale but they will take the name and picture of a different guy and put it on the card. The club representative will just dash the guy (official) some money.

¹¹¹ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011

¹¹² Interview with Damien Barracks FC 19/04/2011- Accra

Furthermore, notwithstanding the best efforts of the PFAG, the industry is still rife with contractual insecurity and inadequate medical and insurance coverage. Given the lack of universal health care provision, the health risks associated with a career in a football are thus born by the players themselves. I witnessed this for myself during a training session at a Glo Premier League club, a club recognised as being one of the best equipped and managed in the country. A player ran over to the sidelines before the training match and rummaged in his bag, he produced a pair of Charlie Wo-Te¹¹³ and then proceeded to stuff them down his socks and then pulled the socks up to his knees- he was using Charlie Wo-Te as shin guards. Nobody from the coaching staff reprimanded or stopped him, one fellow spectator laughed and asked him what he thought he was doing (clearly also surprised by what he was seeing), only for the player to reply in Twi “I don’t have shin pads so what do you want me to do?” He then ran and joined the match. On the one hand I had to applaud his ingenuity, but on the other it seemed a little reckless. I asked if the team were worried about injuries and was told that there are lots of players ready to take someone’s place- ‘Ghana naturally produces talent so we don’t have a shortage of players’¹¹⁴.

It is important not to overstate the ‘culture of mediocrity’ view, because as I explain later in this thesis, this is part of the explanation, but not the sole reason out-migration has become more prevalent. However, it is fair to acknowledge that the above creates the impression of an environment in which many Ghanaian clubs are incapable of offering the economic incentives, opportunities for progression, contractual security and facilities that might encourage players to remain in Ghana. Problematically, obtaining a transfer and finding a club to provide you with international exposure, when potentially competing against over 20,000 players in Accra alone with the same dream, is easier said than done. Through my interactions with young people at the three clubs, it became increasingly apparent that having opted to pursue a career in professional football, they now found themselves in somewhat of a quandary. Ghanaian football is inherently unpredictable. This point is perhaps best illustrated using an anecdote from Barracks FC (which I have summarized below), where what began as a routine morning training session culminated in a trip to prison.

¹¹³ Charlie Wo-Te are a traditional and popular flip flop worn by many Ghanaian adults and children

¹¹⁴ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011

The Prison Trip- Thursday 17th March 2011

My alarm was set for 6.20am so I could attend training at 7am. It was therefore a surprise when Ricardo (a Swiss volunteer) rang and woke me just before 6am to inform me that a match involving a senior team (third division) had been arranged for that morning. At first we thought that the game would be held at home, but I was told just before I left that it was an away match and the bus would be leaving at 7.45am. We stood around waiting until 9.00am (the players thought the game was starting at 7.00am) and were not being told why. I eventually found out we were waiting for the prison guards- with hindsight this should have been a warning sign for what was to come. We were traveling in the prison service bus, which can seat 40 people max- we numbered closer to 60. The bus was completely packed with people sharing seats and laps, and somewhat understandably given the circumstances, there was a prayer before we embarked on our journey. The journey itself lasted over an hour and some of the players (many of whom were standing throughout) were unhappy with the arrangements, they believed the conditions would leave them fatigued before the match. Nonetheless people were still laughing and joking for the most part (more so on the way home). When we arrived at the destination and realized it was a prison, we were all shocked that Coach John had failed to pass on this piece of information. He had spent the morning repeatedly telling the few players who had enquired not to worry about the opponents, and to just focus on themselves.



Fig 18: On the way to the prison

Coach John explained that the game takes place most years- as part of a sports day at the prison. I found it interesting that none of the players knew whom they were going to be playing against before they arrived, and didn't really seem to mind. There was some further confusion upon arrival at the prison because we had our phones and cameras taken, and then placed in the prison service bus separately from our bags, which were also on the bus. The players were then sent to the staff canteen to get changed and there was a moment of panic when it appeared as though we had forgotten to bring the team kit. It was now past 11am, and many of the players who had been up since at least 6am were hot, tired, thirsty and irritable. Frustratingly, they had left their money (if they had any) on the bus, and found themselves sitting in a canteen but unable to purchase any food or drink. In the prison itself I was surprised how lively and jovial the atmosphere was. We watched a volleyball match between the inmates and guards around midday (the inmates won) and the football match started at 1pm. The players were only able to have a very basic warm up, but still managed to take the lead in the first half. They did eventually lose to the Prison All Stars (2-1). Overall the day was a fascinating and surreal experience. I woke up expecting to attend a routine training session, and found myself watching a football match in a prison surround by thousands of inmates, with hardly a guard in site¹¹⁵.

Incidents as bizarre as the prison trip did not happen on a daily basis, however it allowed me to momentarily experience the chaotic nature of the footballing landscape within which these young people were attempting to migrate. It is from this very landscape that knowledge and understanding of the football migration process stems, a knowledge that is fluid and transferable in the sense that people are the carriers. It is learnt, and subsequently reproduced via the insights gained living in this particular football milieu and witnessing others leave, be they high profile transfers recounted in the media, or more proximate cases and word of mouth. The young people at the clubs were acutely aware as touched upon in the previous chapters, that the act of football migration emerges from and through the practices of a multitude of actors. Ranging from the players themselves, to parents, teachers, clubs, football associations, card dealers, managers and recruitment agents. Drawing upon this information and then attempting to apply it to their own situation, resulted in the realisation that being an 'entrepreneur of self' (introduced in Chapter 5) does not necessarily mean they are in control of their destiny, or could make it on their own in the football industry.

¹¹⁵ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

The majority of certified football agents reside in Europe¹¹⁶ (Poli 2008), and like football clubs they pay ‘tipsters’ and ‘scouts’ (who sometimes pose as official agents) to look for local talent in Ghana. These tipsters usually arrange tournaments and trials for the agent/club to assess the players upon their arrival in Ghana, or in some cases the tipster may send the agent a video of the trial. If a suitable player is discovered, the agent negotiates with the owner of the player’s registration card and provides the player with an invitation letter and short-term visa for a trial abroad. In return, it is often mandatory that a contract be signed, stipulating that the agent is the only person that can negotiate with recruiting clubs. If and when a prospective club wishes to purchase the player, the agent appropriates a commission fee. Furthermore, in cases where the contract between agent and player remains in place for an extended period of time, a commission fee is obtained for any subsequent transfers or contract extensions¹¹⁷. In Ghana, these agents and scouts are strongly linked to trials and tournaments known in short as a ‘Justify’, and in full as a ‘Justify your inclusion’, as described below by Herbert Adika.

It is happening, oh it is happening all over Ghana right now. If this pitch could talk it would tell you right now how many agents have come here to do what they call justify your inclusion. They say you will be travelling to let’s say any European country just come and pay 30m cedis that is 3,000 new GHC and you will see people rushing to pay for a trip, but you don’t even know if it will come off¹¹⁸.

Accordingly the players at all three clubs strongly associated a ‘Justify’ and foreign scouts/agents/tipsters with their career progression and the ability to migrate. This message is also prevalent in the media and popular press. The following is the dialogue from a Guinness television advertisement titled ‘Scout’, which is shown regularly in Ghana- an advert that many of the players believed to be indicative of real life. In the advert a European football scout comes to ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’ (in the advert it is unclear exactly which country he is in) to find the next football star. After driving around the country and witnessing brilliant football performances wherever he goes, the advert concludes with the revelation that his designated taxi driver is the star

¹¹⁶ In recent years an increasing number of players’ agents have been licensed by African football federations

¹¹⁷ Interview with Addae, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra, Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA, Interview with Anthony Baffoe 10/04/2011- PFAG and Interview with Damien, Barracks FC 19/04/2011- Accra. See also Poli (2008).

¹¹⁸ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

player he was searching for all along.

My name is Tommy Howe I am a football scout. You could say that my job is to look for greatness. I came here expecting to find it. I just didn't expect to find so much of it. I've travelled the world in search of talent and I can't ever remember seeing the game played so beautifully. Here, give a man half the chance, and he takes it. I guess it is true what they say. There is a drop of GREATNESS in every man ¹¹⁹.

Importantly in the context of football migration, as explained below by GFA executive Evans Amenumey, it is felt that scouts and agents primarily from 'outside', but also locally, attempt to take advantage of the growing synonymy between foreign scouts and migration opportunities.

Oh those from outside are even worse they confuse the whole situation. As soon as the boys hear you are coming to take them abroad that even worsens the situation because then they misbehave anyhow. When you tell them wait the man is deceiving you, they don't want to listen. It is a serious problem in Ghana everybody hearing Europe, Europe, Europe that is all. That he has to go by force¹²⁰.

Jusef, a thirty-year old (football age nineteen) Nigerian football player whom I met through a mutual acquaintance in Accra- the UEFA qualified Coach Eniwoke- described this belief in the reliance on an 'agent' to facilitate a move as follows;

If you are in a dark room and just in the corner you can see some small light, you will take your self to the light to try to see. For us players we see these agents as a light to take us from the darkness. The agents give us hope¹²¹.

As mentioned above, knowledge concerning football migration is transferable in the sense that people are the carriers. It is learnt tacitly and reproduced through experiences encountered growing up in this particular context. However tacit knowledge does not have to be accurate or lead to intended outcomes. At Barracks FC for example, players were convinced that official scouts from several major European clubs (e.g. Juventus of Italy) had recently come to watch them play, but the club manager at the time

¹¹⁹ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011

¹²⁰ Interview with Evans Amenumey 29/03/2011- GFA

¹²¹ Interview with Jusef 20/02/2011- Accra

investigated their authenticity and found the scouts to be impostors¹²². The challenge therefore, becomes one of distinguishing legitimate opportunities from illusions concocted by opportunistic fraudsters. Thus uncertainty and a sense of risk emerge and converge in the search to grasp opportunities to migrate through football. As the owner of Austin Texans FC explained, once practices recognised as legitimate are displayed, exploitation can take place by manipulating learned, fundamental and sometimes unconscious beliefs and values. This provides a means through which one person can exercise and abuse power over another person, which as noted by Anderson (2007), is crucial to understanding the mobilisations of potential irregular migrants.

These agents put a pinch of truth in a big lie and because these players are so desperate to leave their brains go blank. They don't even ask questions like why am I paying 5,000 now? I could get an office in Osu and make it look professional, go down to the beach and make some white friends and ask them to come and chill at my office. Players will see me moving with white people and think I am connected, so I will tell them I have this deal in Germany we need to get a video of you and send it. Then when we do the video the club will send an invitation letter before I go to Dubai on business, but first you just need to make a down payment. But the moment they come into the office these guys are confused their brain is blank¹²³

Football agents, scouts and tipsters exploit this ambivalence by mimicking practices perceived to be legitimately taking place in football, but also in society more broadly, 'the Pied Piper who leads the children away with their parent's blessing...is the key to this modern slavery...he is commissioned to take full advantage of the extended family, and of the poor man's assumption that anywhere is better than here' (Astill 2001 cited in Manzo 2005a, p.397). This statement refers to child traffickers and labour exploitation that takes place by abusing the practice of 'cultural placement' in Sub Saharan Africa, particularly child migrants in Benin, Togo, Senegal and the Côte d'Ivoire. Traditionally, 'cultural placement' is a reciprocal arrangement whereby child labour is exchanged for education and/or training, as well as the means of subsistence (Manzo 2005a). GFA executive Jordan Anagblah provided an example of similar practices at his own club.

¹²² Interview with Damien, Barracks FC 19/04/2011- Accra

¹²³ Interview with Addae, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra

There was a small boy in my team and the father came and told me somebody is taking him to Belgium. Whether he is going to kill him he doesn't know, but because he has heard football and Europe he thinks his son will make money and be ok. You don't know these people, you only met them now in Ghana when they came to watch him play, and you say you are giving your boy out for adoption? Nonsense! I tell them ok well let us sign a pre-contract as he trained with my club, but he started saying 'oh well the people say they don't want to sign any papers'. So I told him to just go get away from me and take the registration card and go. I don't have to make a problem for myself it is his child. He says the man wants to adopt his son, so ok let him take your son. What can I do?¹²⁴

I unwittingly discovered that this interaction with an agent does not necessarily have to take place face to face, when I became embroiled in what appeared to be an attempted case of 'trafficking through football' at Barracks FC. As I stood by the side of the pitch taking notes and making observations during what appeared to be a routine early morning training session at Barracks FC, Alain, one of the volunteer coaches working at the club approached me. He explained how Godwin, one of the players currently out on the training pitch had just been offered a contract by a professional team in China. Given that my research was on the migration of African football players, he assumed I would be interested to find out more. I was somewhat surprised by this news, and Alain innocuously touched upon why, when he intimated that he had serious reservations with regards to the authenticity of the contract offer. The reason for his caution was that although Godwin was hard working and dedicated, he was far from the most talented player. In fact, he was probably one of the weakest players in the squad, and had yet to be offered a place and registration card at the club. I was also further intrigued as to how he had managed to procure a transfer, given that I was certain he had not mentioned recently attending a trial or 'justify' in any of our previous conversations.

After training as the players began to leave and I put away my notebook and recording equipment, Godwin signaled for me to come and talk to him privately. He disclosed that Alain and I were the only people at the club he had confided in, and asked me not to tell anyone else about his situation, for reasons later elaborated upon. He then asked me to meet him at Sharpnet Internet Café later that day, so he could tell me more about his transfer and a dilemma he was facing. When I arrived at Sharpnet Internet Café, Godwin and his brother explained the aforementioned dilemma. He was unsure whether or not to inform Barracks FC of the offer. As he had yet to

¹²⁴ Interview with Jordan Anagblah 29/03/2011- GFA

sign his registration card, he was concerned that doing so would make him less attractive to the club in China, as in accordance with FIFA regulations they would have to pay compensation to his former club. Until this point he had never signed a registration card with a club in Accra, even at Colts level. This was because as Godwin had explained to me on a previous occasion, at the age of 14 with his families backing, he ‘dropped out’ of formal education and opted for a career in professional football. He had spent just under three years attending trials at various clubs, but never signed a registration card. This justified Alex’s concern and also my own, because it was a clear indication of Godwin’s limited footballing ability. It also highlights again how football can ‘become’ a career path upon reaching the transition from junior to senior secondary school.

I explained to Godwin and his brother that unfortunately, I would be unable to assist him with his dilemma, as I was unfamiliar with visa and social security number applications. Furthermore, it would be a conflict of interests for me to advise him on as to whether he should inform the club of his situation. Although visibly disappointed, he understood and accepted my reasons and thanked me for listening to his plight. I then asked him to recount how he ended up in this situation, and I was correct in my recollection that Godwin had not previously mentioned attending a ‘justify’. He had not met the scout on a football pitch in Accra, he met him online in an Internet café in Accra. He explained how he had uploaded a CV detailing his football biography and a promotional video (recorded using his mobile phone) showcasing his skills to a football recruitment website, which he believed was used by professional clubs to find players. He was then contacted on a social networking site by an agent who claimed to have seen his profile on the recruitment website. After exchanging a handful of emails, the agent offered Godwin a contract with a professional Chinese football team worth \$400,000 per season for three years¹²⁵. It was from this seemingly innocuous online encounter that Godwin was able to procure his transfer.

At this point in my research, I had yet to hear of the mobilization of football trafficking migrants taking place online. However, I was somewhat skeptical about the likelihood of a professional football club offering a multimillion-dollar contract to a player based on video footage taken on a mobile phone. I asked Godwin if he was willing to give me a copy of the contract and show me the email exchanges with the agent, to which he agreed. I entered the agents name into a well-known Internet search engine, and the

¹²⁵ A copy of the emails can be found in the Appendix

first ‘hit’ was a link to a website highlighting that this individual was a known fraudster, not just in football, but also in the sports industry more generally. His modus operandi involved contacting athletes, coaches, physiotherapists etc and offering them contracts with various sporting institutions around the world, in exchange for a commission. Godwin had yet to make any payments to the agent was grateful that he had been made aware of this deceit, he was understandably disappointed that his dream of a professional contract was no longer a reality. It may or may not surprise some readers to know that Godwin informed me how this experience would not prevent him utilizing the Internet to achieve his goal, and he would continue looking for transfer opportunities online¹²⁶.

The anecdote provided by Jordan Anagblah and the case of Godwin, reconfirm the importance of acknowledging agency, but also how potential migrants (and their guardians in the case of some minors) understand and assess risk in relation to migration opportunities (see also Hernández-Carretero 2009). The concept of risk has been explored in the social sciences, most notably in the work of Giddens (1991) and Beck (1992), and it currently receives multiple meanings and uses according to the context. Like Hernández-Carretero (2009), I propose that in contemporary Western vernacular risk is often imbued with negative connotations and synonymity with danger. Yet in order to understand the young people I encountered in Accra, a more value-neutral interpretation reflective of their subjectivities and dispositions is needed. This is because when I attempted to understand agency and risk with regards to how they sought to create opportunities to go, and assessed who was acceptable to trust and go with amidst this unpredictability and uncertainty, the answer to this question was simple. ‘You have to try your luck’.

4.3 You have to try your luck

‘Trying your luck’ was a popular phrase used by the players, connotating a frame of mind, a temperament and associated forms of practice. It emanates from the aforementioned notion of ‘managing’, and resonates with ‘dubriagem¹²⁷ in Guinea Bissau (Vigh 2006; Vigh 2010) and ‘débrouiller’ in Cameroon (Waage 2006). These expressions are used by young people in their respective countries to describe the ability to improvise using accessible

¹²⁶ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC, and Interview with Godwin, Barracks FC 15/04/2011

¹²⁷ A Creole word that originates from the French “se débrouiller”, which can be translated as “to get by or get the best out of a situation” (Vigh 2006, p.117).

resources, and amend strategies and plans according to opportunities and constraints. It entails attempting to make calculated decisions and behaving in a judicious manner, despite often lacking the privilege of being able to base these calculations on discrete and stable variables (Langevang & Gough 2009). The term given to this form of agency is 'social navigation', which drawing on de Certeau's (2011) distinction between 'tactics' and 'strategies', allows the tactical practices that emanate from actors creative responses to their surroundings to be understood as a form of strategic navigation (Langevang & Gough 2009; Vigh 2010). This form of agency is necessary because as noted by Porter et al, 'African cities and their route-ways are landscapes of processes which are nearly as much in flux as the young people who inhabit and move through them' (2010, p.297). In everyday Accra, this flux is constrained by certain factors, most notably cash. Money enables a person to circumvent and overcome almost any obstacle and unexpected situation they are likely to encounter¹²⁸. In Accra it is far easier 'trying your luck' with loaded pockets.

There are also two other factors that are capable of constraining this flux, a distinguishable talent or skill and the spiritual realm. Crucially, an advantage of 'trying your luck' and migrating through a career in professional football- unlike other areas of Ghanaian and West African life¹²⁹ more generally- is that it is not solely dependent on financial resources (this is particularly pertinent given that the majority of football players in Ghana still come from low-income households). Instead, it is argued to be strongly dependent upon utilizing the other two factors mentioned above. These three factors, namely; money, skill/talent and the spiritual realm hold the key to successful social navigation if utilized appropriately. Although this was a topic of discussion on numerous occasions in Accra, it also arose during interviews with young people in Paris who had experienced irregular migration through football. Gerard, a sixteen year-old migrant from Guinea, articulated the situation best when he stated.

In Guinea everything is a question of money but football is a mythical sport, money plays a part but with football there is chance which comes from God and also you have to have talent and be able to play, so it is not always the people that have money who succeed. There are people who live near where I came from that have money and tried everything they can so that their child can go, and they still don't have a visa, but I got a visa. There are people with money who want their kids to get a

¹²⁸ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

¹²⁹ This concept is also the result of interview data from informants in Paris

visa to go and play football and do the same thing as me but it didn't work for them.¹³⁰

Rather than relying on a specific causal factor, namely wealth, this triumvirate provides young people in Accra and other parts of West Africa who are attempting to 'try their luck', and/or other related forms of social navigation, with a means to comprehend the causal nature of a football migration process that often appears incomprehensible. These strategies diffuse causality by providing an explanatory tool to decipher events that appear inexplicable or random. Kojo, an under-17 player at Future Icons FC provided an example of this point, by comparing the career of Michael Essien who is currently playing for Chelsea FC, to his former international teammate Ishmael Addo, who spent most of his career at Hearts of Oak and now plays for Wassaman United in the Ghana Glo Premier League.

If you look at Michael Essien he was not the best player in the Black Satellites (Ghana under-20's), Ishmael Addo was top goal scorer and was the star. So Essien is doing or gaining something from the spiritual side that Addo isn't, or maybe Addo is doing something that he shouldn't be which is affecting his spiritual support. Without spiritual backing you will never succeed.¹³¹

In addition, Jules, a twenty-five year old Cameroonian residing in Paris, provided the following example.

For me the thing I want to say is that I have heard a lot of young guys believe that players like E'too and Drogba have some spiritual people behind them who help. I heard that a player like E'too fucks men to get more power. They are not gay but they fuck guys. I was very traumatized the first time I see or hear about this, how a man can do that? But they say when you do that you take the power of that man. Also in Cameroon they say never let your boots leave your eyes. You should sleep with them under your pillow. It is like that, you don't just leave them everywhere for people to tamper with¹³².

There are several potential discussion points that emerge from the quotes above, an obvious example being perceptions surrounding sexuality, however for the moment I will continue with the underlying topic of causality. As indicated above, the young people I encountered believed in the existence of invisible supernatural forces, which interact with the material world and influence their life chances and everyday activities. While reference to

¹³⁰ Interview with Gerard (Guinean) 12/07/2011- Paris

¹³¹ Interview with Kojo, Barracks FC 17/04/2011

¹³² Interview with Jules (Cameroonian) 10/07/2011- Paris

spiritual and supernatural causality in an African context is often seen as confirming stereotypes of primitivism and backwardness (Geschiere 1998), this approach to understanding causality can and very often is a reflection of adaptation to, and a part of modernity, which exists throughout the contemporary world (Geschiere & Roitman 1997; Meyer 1998; Parish 2000; Simone 2005). More importantly, professional football is littered with examples of references to spiritual and religious causation (Armstrong & Giulianotti 2004; Schatzberg 2006). A contemporary and high profile example being the 'Pray for Muamba' campaign, after the Bolton Wanderers FC player Fabrice Muamba collapsed following a cardiac arrest during a live televised match (Benson 2012; Cooper 2012; Easton 2012). Kurt Okraku, secretary of GHALCA also made a similar observation with regards to the prevalence of spiritual causality in the football industry

The European will tell you that fasting before a game will effect the energy levels of a player, an African player will tell you to fuck off you are lying. They believe that luck plays a bigger role than the round leather itself. In our part of the world religion plays a big part, for Europeans maybe not a big part but it does play a part make no mistake about it. I have been to European clubs where religion is key. I have had chats with football people who really believe in the mystical world. It is not for fun that you go to Old Trafford and Andy Cole wanted to be the last person to walk onto the pitch. It is not for fun that in the dressing room of United David Beckham had to sit on that chair in the little corner and nobody sits there, it is for a reason. But believe me when I say it is worse in Argentina and Brazil, oh believe me it is worse. The things that go on there, if I were to tell you then you would never believe it you would never believe the voodoo. But most of these things do not come into the public domain¹³³.

¹³³ Interview with Kurt Okraku 14/02/2011- GHALCA



Fig 19: Pray 4 Muamba (Paul Childs/Action Images in The Guardian 2012)

Theorists of celebrity culture contend that celebrities are the product of rational and modern post-God societies, the embodiment of neoliberal democracy and capitalism. The latter's model of exchange and value extended to include the individual facilitating a commodification of self (Andrews & Jackson 2001; Marshall 1997; Rojek 2001; Rojek 2006; Wagg 2007). I would argue, similarly to Pype (2009), that celebrity is not a secular counterpart and that it can and is found in social contexts where fame derives not merely through Rojek's (2001) widely accepted typology of ascribed (e.g. lineage), achieved (e.g. sport or the arts) and celetoid produced (e.g. Big Brother). Celebrities can also exist in societies where they are associated with possessing spiritual powers, particularly if we follow Rojek's own definition of celebrity, from the Latin *celebrem* meaning 'fame and being thronged' (Rojek 2001, p.9). This is clearly the case in Ghanaian football where male players become celebrities through sporting success, while simultaneously being considered by members of the public to be beneficiaries of spiritual assistance. This is neither oxymoronic nor indicative of being an irrational pre-modern society. Ghanaian football players particularly those playing in Europe, have attained celebrity status and are strongly associated with conspicuous consumption and living the 'X Way'.

Somewhat understandably the outcome and an individual player's performance during a football match or trial, takes on added significance when it is believed that it could potentially shape the destiny of those involved. You never know when your defining moment will arrive. It therefore becomes imperative to ensure that any unforeseen elements that could prove

detrimental to the obtainment of a transfer are neutralized. Accordingly, young Ghanaian males seeking to migrate through football would attempt various rituals ranging from prayer, fasting, vigils and the use of what was commonly referred to as 'medicine'. It was believed that they could not achieve their desired goal without actively seeking the intervention of the spiritual and religious realm. Other examples of the recourse to spiritual and religious causality included; placing 'medicine' in their equipment¹³⁴, making the sign of the cross as they came onto the pitch, kissing a crucifix before the game began, pointing to the sky to acknowledge God after scoring a goal, prostrating on the ground after scoring and pouring water that had been blessed by a priest over their heads before a match to help them win¹³⁵. It was customary for teams to pray before, during (at the half-time interval) and after the game. This was especially true at Barracks FC, who unlike Future Icons FC and Austin Texans FC made it compulsory for the players to attend the local Pentecostal church on Sunday, Monday, Wednesday and Friday, sometimes for the duration of the night.



Fig 20: Church in the background

¹³⁴ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

¹³⁵ Interview with Jusef 20/02/2011- Accra

I delicately asked the players about their rituals, but stopped doing so once it was explained that the more intricate details are not something that ones shares or discloses publicly. I did inadvertently become embroiled in an altercation regarding the use of ‘medicine’ at Barracks FC, while talking to a player named Elias behind the goal posts before a training session. Elias was unable to train with his under-17 teammates due to a hamstring injury, and during the course of our conversation, he put on a pair of goal-keeping gloves that were lying amongst a pile of other equipment. Moments later Jonathan, the owner of the gloves, approached us and began remonstrating with Elias for placing his hands inside them. He warned Elias never to do so again, as he could have affected the effectiveness of the ‘medicine’ that had been placed inside, and negatively influenced his performances on the pitch¹³⁶. This incident later stood out because it further encapsulated how these young people understood causality in multiple ways, not just through a spiritual and religious lens, there is an underlying blending of causal modes. Jonathan confronted Elias for potentially influencing his spiritual support, but he did so at a training session.

The five game losing streak of Barracks FC’s senior team provided an example of how the institutional context influenced not only whether the players believed in the use of medicine and rituals, but the extent to which it was acted upon. In an attempt to improve results on the pitch, the players lengthened their usual fasts and kept longer vigils before matches. The response to the losing streak came to symbolize the differences in mentalities between the Obruni¹³⁷ volunteers, and the clubs local players and coaches. It was also a subject touched upon by players at Future Icons FC. With regards to the Obruni volunteers, they would often talk amongst themselves, and occasionally with one or two of the players, about the illogicality of belief in spiritual causality. It was suggested that staying up all night before a game and fasting could leave the players tired and dehydrated, thus negatively impacting their performances. Conversely, many of the players explained how hard work and practice alone are not enough to make it as a professional player, because as mentioned above, there are too many unaccountable variables/hidden structures. The plight of Barracks FC was common knowledge at nearby Future Icons FC, and many of the players were

¹³⁶ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011- Barracks FC

¹³⁷ Obruni is a term used to describe a western visitor, usually white but can be used to refer to a Western foreigner more broadly

unsurprised by the decline in results. Kwabena, a senior team play at Future Icons FC, explained that Barracks FC had courted controversy the previous season when they sacked key players for not attending church.

They had a striker (Barracks FC) and he scored for them in the divisions, now he is playing in division one. They played a match and they scored a team 4-3, and he scored three of the goals. Then in the middle of the league they sack him because he didn't go to church. So why are they losing now? Because those that helped them qualify they have sacked them, they even sacked all of their defenders because of this church business.

They sacked all of the players, they got the experience to play for second division and that is why they qualified, because they can play. But now you are sacking them and using small boys from the academy to play. You are using your young players, 2009 under seventeen players and you are using them in the second division. How? They can't play, now it is too early for them and God bless them if they don't lose all the twenty-two games...For us we are not under any church and we have some Muslims in our team so going to church is not compulsory. For me I can't say that people put too much faith in luck and the church because it helps but alone it is not enough¹³⁸

As Jusef also explained during a discussion on the topic of spirituality, 'if rubbing holy water alone on your head will make you win the game then why bother going to training?'¹³⁹ There is a tension between striving for proprietorship of one's self and the notion that a person is to a large extent operated through spiritual powers (Meyer 1998). It is therefore also important to understand how this form of causation related to, and coalesced with the notion of nurturing and drawing on an individual's footballing ability and talent. Kurt Okraku best articulated this position when explaining that a person cannot assume that religion alone will secure footballing success.

First of all we need to accept that football is a science. If you think you don't need to train and sitting in the church praying will get the result then you are fooling yourself, you will never get the result. You can bring 11 world-renowned pastors and put them in a strip and on the pitch but they wont win. So lets get what must be done right and then back it up with the spiritual world¹⁴⁰.

The topic of natural talent and sporting ability was briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, when I highlighted that one of the reasons a career in professional football is considered more attractive than other vocations is

¹³⁸ Interview with Kwabena, Future Icons 25/02/2011- Accra

¹³⁹ Interview with Jusef 20/02/2011- Accra

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Kurt Okraku 14/02/2011- GHALCA

linked to ideas of race and innate physical attributes. Guttman (1978) argued that the standardization of rules within modern sports was influenced by the principle of equality, and the attempt to establish fair and egalitarian competitive conditions. Despite this attempt to create a 'level playing field', the potential for what he calls an 'inequality of results' remains. Given the supposedly egalitarian nature of modern sport, the presence of successful black male athletes in certain sports and not in others is claimed to signify a correlation between race and sporting ability.

Arguments placing nature and not nurture at the centre of sporting success have however been refuted as a form of racist thinking (St Louis 2004; St Louis 2003; Whannel 2002). They are reliant upon a 'heuristic illusory correlation' combined with 'overestimation bias', which leads to the conclusion that two issues - in this case racial phenotype and athleticism- are related, and an overestimation of biological differences between groups as compared to within groups (Rasmussen et al. 2005). Nevertheless, Daniel a senior team player and coach for Barracks FC under-17 team confirmed as did several others when I asked why he and young Ghanaian males more generally believed they could become footballers, that the belief black West African males are physically predestined to excel in football, a form of palatable racism, is omnipresent in Accra ¹⁴¹.

(Laughter) Kobby you yourself you know you know, naturally we are strong we can play that's what we blacks think. Football is part of our spirit. Even me I think the same thing and that's why I am playing. That's why so many boys think they can become footballers¹⁴².

Herbert Adika an executive at the GFA also explained that the assumption Ghanaian's are naturally gifted football players is widespread

Here people think we have the talent, that is the attitude and they say 'I know it so I can go for it' so they go thinking that if they put the ball down they can play ¹⁴³

Black West African males often emasculated in other fields have become immersed within this vision of a footballing hierarchy, which they believe places them at or very close to the top. Although it is also argued that given the relatively small numbers who are able to obtain a career in professional-

¹⁴¹ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011

¹⁴² Interview with Daniel, Future Icons FC 24/02/2011- Accra

¹⁴³ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

particularly European- football, the tendency to depict black West African males and footballing success as one and the same is contrary to reality (Poli 2010). The aforementioned belief is in many ways reaffirmed by the concentration and prevalence of scouting networks and academies in this region (Bale 2004; Darby & Solberg 2010; Poli 2010). This is why they and not, North, East or South Africans have become the primary target of foreign football clubs and talent scouts. Anthony Baffoe, a former Ghanaian international football player and secretary of the PFAAG, did not attribute this situation to race, but he acknowledged the notoriety of West African males in professional football.

The western region is very very successful. Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana just look at the players. Muntari (AC Milan), Drogba (Chelsea FC), Gyan (Sunderland FC), the Toure brothers (Manchester City FC), Keita (FC Barcelona), Mikel (Chelsea FC), Obinna (FCL Moscow) you can just go on and on. It is incredible. You can go to Mali and there is also Kanoute (FC Seville)¹⁴⁴.

Influenced by social constructionism, it has been argued that by constructing a link between race, gender and athletic performance, sport media discourses play a critical role in pedagogizing the minds of both children and adults. Confirming and reconstructing images that are fitting with hegemonic discourses concerning social group relations, and distorting perceptions of athletic performance based on racial stereotypes (Azzarito & Harrison Jr 2008; Hayes & Sugden 1999; King 2004; McCarthy et al. 2003; McCarthy & Jones 1997; Messner et al. 2000; Messner 1989; Simons 2003; Rasmussen et al. 2005). The value of sporting bodily capital attributed to racialized and gendered bodies is in part socially constructed, as it is the social value that is attached to physical capacities such as speed and strength that are meaningful, not the capacities themselves. However to better understand the situation in Accra and how race influences migratory practices requires looking beyond the mantra of social construction, and engaging with the issue of corporeality and understandings of race and gender as spatially embodied practices.

When viewed from the position of aspirant Ghanaian migrants in the football industry, race is not merely a social construct, it has a clear and identifiable materiality that emerges from the site of the body itself. People are phenotypically different, and while phenotype does not necessarily refer to skin colour, it and other visible characteristics (e.g. clothing, hairstyle,

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Anthony Baffoe 10/04/2011- PFAAG

piercing, height, weight) are recognized in real, everyday interactions and play a role in what people are able to do (Slocum 2008).

The young people I met who were seeking to 'try their luck' and migrate through football were aware of, and acted upon certain beliefs attributed to bodily differences, their bodies were not only inscribed with a particular projection of race and masculinity. Let us take the practice of age falsification as an example. I have discussed how and why this practice takes place in this and a previous chapter, and the finer machinations are not necessary here. But to recap, players are allowed to falsify their ages and do so because as a financial investment, younger players are more attractive to scouts and clubs. However, the reason young people in Accra assumed they were able to do so, was linked to the belief that foreigners, particularly white people, are unable to accurately estimate the age of black people.

In this context, what happens to certain bodies and what those bodies are able to do, and the fact they tend to be white, pink, brown, yellow or black in certain spaces and places are important in order to understand how and why certain practices occur (see also Slocum 2008). Inscriptions are read, understood and influence perceptions of what is physically capable, and more importantly what is required in order to obtain a transfer abroad. Bodies became racialized not just through discourses but also through their actions, racial capacities attributed to the body are enabled and also limited by the social-physical space in which it was located (see also Saldanha 2006). I will draw on two further examples to elaborate this point, firstly the choice of position that aspirant migrants opt to play in, and secondly the training practices that are employed.

It is not only choosing to play football that increases the prospect of successfully migrating, but also which position you opt to play in. Sisi, an under-17 goalkeeper at Barracks FC, expressed this predicament when recounting his experience at a trial where an official scout from St Etienne came to watch the team. 'By the grace of God I played an almost perfect game, I played very very nice maybe the best game of my life'. After the game the scout informed the team manager that Sisi had indeed performed brilliantly, but 'he was not looking for a goalkeeper so it didn't matter how well I played. I have a gift from God to be able to play in goal but now they just come here to get strong defensive midfielders and attackers'¹⁴⁵. Sisi's choice of playing position is problematic, because although West African goalkeepers are increasingly prevalent in professional leagues around the world, it was often

¹⁴⁵ Also discussed in an interview with Damien, Barracks FC 19/04/2011- Accra

commented upon that scouts do not come to Africa to look for goalkeepers. What Sisi is referring to is the practice of 'stacking' (Alegi 2010; Giulianotti 1999; Maguire 1988), where in the context of football it is argued that black players are often placed in certain playing positions.

It is argued that this is due to widely held stereotypes that black players lack intellect and leadership abilities, but are good athletes (Alegi 2010; Jones 2002; King 2004; Maguire 1988; Maguire 1991; Melnick 1988). An outcome of the practice of stacking is not merely discursive, but also materializes in the presence of players opting to play in wide positions, as defensive midfielders and attacking forwards whenever possible. This is due to the perception that scouts are actively seeking these types of players. The spatiality of race in this context is not simply 'one of grids of self/other dialectics, but one of viscosity, bodies gradually becoming sticky and clustering into aggregates' (Saldanha 2006, p.10).



Fig 21: Bad Position?

It is not just where but also how the players believed they were expected to perform on the field of play that was important to their plans. Daniel, a senior team player and coach for Future Icons FC's under-17 team highlighted this point, and how it is believed that Ghanaian and African players more generally adapt their performance to please foreign teams.

We blacks we know that we are naturally strong and can play football, but I always advise them [Colts players] that yes we have strength but here today if you want to impress scouts you must add to what you are having, add some skills and tactics to it. Like Ronaldo [Cristiano], he can run but he is also good with the ball. It is not just about being strong. We think that if you are strong you will get to play football and that is why the players end up playing a certain football. If you look at some of the big players, Essien, Drogba, Eboue if you look at the way they play when they are in Europe they always want to prove that they are strong. Look at Obi Mikel he was a skillful playmaker when he was younger but now at Chelsea he is a defensive player. He wants to play the way Essien plays, so now it is like he has lost everything because he used to be a creative player and now he is not because he thinks to get in the team he has to show that he is strong. So he wants to play that kind of football. Look at Michael Essien, he plays differently for Ghana and Chelsea. At Chelsea he does much more running and is more defensively minded, he is there to be strong and protect the defenders, but for Ghana he runs less and touches the ball more and plays his natural game¹⁴⁶.

Understanding expectations regarding how they were expected to perform was important to their migratory aspirations, because as noted by Herbert Adika, there is an increasing awareness that success in modern football is reliant upon more than physical prowess.

Yes maybe you can play the ball all right but can you last ninety minutes? Can you play the tactical way that is now needed in the modern game? It was when Abedi went out and he was playing for Marseille, he realized that over there, there is a way you have to play you don't just play anyhow you want. They will give you a certain role and a way you must play, there is a system for you¹⁴⁷

The owners, coaches and players at all three clubs explained how important it was to learn and apply the training methods used by European clubs, as it enabled them to understand scientific modes of causation- as alluded to above by Kurt Okraku- and compliment the natural sporting ability of black Ghanaian males¹⁴⁸. Richard an academy player at Future Icons FC gave an example of this point when he stated

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Daniel, Future Icons FC 24/02/2011

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

¹⁴⁸ Their stated intention and ability to actually implement these methods are often not one and the same

Look at Baby Jet (Asamoah Gyan of Sunderland FC) for instance, he has upgraded. When he was here at Liberty (Glo Premier League) he was good, but over there the European's can take a black player who is strong and then with their training add the skills and tactics to it to make him a better player¹⁴⁹.

For example, the coaches and players at Barracks FC explained how the presence of 'Obruni' volunteer coaches was highly welcomed, as it allowed them to understand European training techniques. This involved studying certain aspects and details of the match, and attempting to isolate practices and procedures that are considered to bring consistent success and improved performances e.g. employing specialist coaches and training methods specific to particular outcomes and scenarios on the pitch. Crucially, this was seen as making the players more attractive to foreign scouts and thus increasing their chance of procuring a move abroad if, or rather when, the opportunity arose¹⁵⁰.

In this situation, race took shape not just through racialized sporting discourses, but from the physical gathering of bodies, through which phenotype influenced connections to material objects, practices and processes (see also Grosz 1994; Saldanha 2006; Slocum 2008). The 'Obruni' volunteers did not explicitly state that, 'black Ghanaian males are aggressive, explosive, powerful, energetic and quick but with impulsive and wild moments, where deficiencies in their cognitive capabilities result in tactical naivety and a lack of composure at critical moments'. Nor did the Ghanaian players and coaches explicitly state that the 'Obruni are intelligent, tactically aware, determined and hard working'. These ideas were often unspoken yet embodied in the training practices that were introduced and employed. I will use a simple example from one of many possible training exercises that I witnessed to illustrate this point.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Richard, Future Icons FC 02/04/2011- Accra

¹⁵⁰ James Esson, field notes Accra 2011 and Interview with Jonas (Senior team coach), Barracks FC 21/04/2011, Interview with Isaac (Senior team coach), Austin Texans FC 25/02/2011



Fig 22: Cones not Goals

Instead of undertaking a training exercise where the objective was scoring a goal on a large pitch as is often the case in Ghana, the drill would involve completing a certain number of passes in a smaller designated area. Once the target number of passes was achieved the successful team would be awarded a point. Thus attention was removed from the outcome of merely scoring a goal at any costs in a large open space- a situation where more physically able players can excel using their strength and speed- to a situation where retention of the ball through forward thinking, quick decision making and technique are more important, skills that function on a physical but also on a cognitive and technical level. These were the skills considered to be highly coveted by the football scouts young Ghanaian players are so desperate to impress, in the hope of 'going outside' and 'making it'.

6.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that despite the promotion of professionalism within Ghanaian football, in contrast to the earlier state governed era of developmental football, footballers are now keen to leave and ply their trade abroad. This scenario is often attributed to the challenging conditions facing professional football players caused by the 'culture of mediocrity' pervading Ghanaian, and West African football more generally. Problematically,

obtaining a transfer and migrating is easier said than done. Knowledge concerning football migration is transferable in the sense that people are the carriers, and it is learnt and subsequently reproduced through the insights gained living in this particular football milieu. Yet despite this knowledge, it is often difficult to distinguish genuine opportunities to migrate from scams concocted by opportunistic fraudsters. So how do you create opportunities to go, and decide whom to go with amidst this unpredictability and uncertainty? The answer to this question was simple, 'you have to try your luck'. This is a form of social navigation that entails trying to make calculated decisions despite often lacking the benefit of basing these calculations on discrete and secure variables (Langevang & Gough 2009). Crucially, unlike other areas of Ghanaian life, 'trying your luck' and migrating through a career in professional football is not reliant upon money alone. Instead, it is dependent upon utilizing a distinguishable talent or skill (in this case football) and the spiritual realm, which alongside money form the key to success.

The final section of this chapter showed how a tension between striving for proprietorship of one's self, and the notion that a person is to a large extent operated through spiritual powers (see also Meyer 1998) is prevalent amongst male Ghanaian youth. This tension is overcome by blending modes of causality, in this case recourse to the spiritual realm and the employment of scientific training methods, which are also shown to be connected to issues of corporeality and understandings of race and gender as spatially embodied practices. Unfortunately, while 'trying your luck' and attempting to migrate through football can provide a means to obtain travel documents and spatial mobility, it appears to still leave the players susceptible to exploitative modes of irregular migration. In this and the preceding chapters I have used Ghana as a case study to look both within and beyond football, in order to illustrate the landscape from which forms of irregular migration originate. The following chapter continues this narrative, by turning to the accounts of young people from West Africa now residing in Paris who have first hand experience of this process.

7.0 Leaving by Force: Overcoming uncertainty through football migration



Fig 23: Leaving by force

7.1 Introduction

In May 2008 a fish trawler abandoned by its captain was found off the shore of Tenerife. Regrettably, the contents were not of the aquatic variety. The cargo consisted of approximately 130 West African males suffering hypothermia and dehydration (McDougall 2008). The last decade has witnessed increasing numbers of African migrants attempting to enter Europe, via unauthorized journeys across the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean (Hernández-Carretero 2009). What made the incident in May 2008 particularly news worthy, was the discovery that several of the survivors found onboard were teenagers, who were erroneously embarking on a journey they believed would lead to football contracts with Real Madrid or Marseille (McDougall 2008). In the European Commission's Study on Sport that following year, it was argued that far from being an isolated incident, an increasing number of young West African males are undertaking clandestine journeys to Europe, often under the false pretense of a contract or trial with a professional football club. Once in the destination country they are abandoned and often remain illegally with no means of subsistence. According to Jean-Claude Mbvoumin, a former Cameroonian international footballer and the founder of CFS, not only is the number of cases increasing, the means by which migrants arrive in Europe are also more diverse and complex.

Everything is fluid in Africa, borders and passports. An increasing number of boys are coming by plane, not just the boats through the Canary Islands. One-month visas are easy to get with bribes in Africa, but once they fail their trials they stay on. They have nothing to go back to...they end up on the streets, worse off and in more danger than they could ever be at home (Mbvoumin cited in McDougall 2008).

Activists initially believed that regulating the practices of football clubs held the key to preventing this form of irregular migration, however it is now argued that such an approach is ineffectual, and two alternative strategies have emerged¹⁵¹. The first proposes that like players who migrate through authorized channels, irregular forms of football related migration are linked to the condition of Sub-Saharan Africa's footballing political economy, namely the 'culture of mediocrity' (discussed in the previous chapter). It is argued that migrants would actually prefer to remain in their country of origin, and developing the footballing infrastructure will allow them to do so. The second strategy proposes that raising awareness in origin countries through

¹⁵¹ Interview with Jean Claude Mbvoumin 06/07/2011- CFS Paris

information centres and press campaigns explaining official transfer procedures, and the dangers of football related migration (particularly the nefarious practices of duplicitous agents), will reduce instances of West African youth falling foul of scams¹⁵².

The awareness approach is deemed particularly attractive and is the current strategy of choice. This is due to its less resource intensive nature and the potential for quicker implementation and thus impact¹⁵³. But would these migrants really prefer to remain at home? Is there a relationship between knowledge concerning football related trafficking and the decision to migrate through football? These are fundamental questions as key stakeholders such as the EU, FIFA and CFS deem this situation a problem to be solved, rather than a phenomenon to be studied. However, if current policies are founded upon flawed assumptions, the likelihood of fixing the problem diminishes. The opening section of the chapter addresses the first question by bringing the moment of departure to the foreground. I show how perceptions of stagnated social development following Ghanaian independence have rendered the prospect of socioeconomic security both within, and beyond football, null and void. Home is precisely where male youth do not want to be, and they seek to navigate this uncertainty through mobility beyond Ghana. In the second part of the chapter, I follow the trajectory of African players to Europe, explicitly Paris (France). I use data obtained from migrants who left West Africa for Europe to shed light on irregular migratory practices within the football industry. I explore the routes these would-be footballers took, and their trajectories and circumstances after arrival. The findings offer a means to critique dominant approaches employed to prevent football trafficking, and show that awareness campaigns in particular are likely to prove limited in their ability to reduce instances of football trafficking.

7.2 Leaving by force

A notable topic of discussion that surfaced throughout my time in Accra undertaking this research project, and also during previous visits, was how 'hard it was here (Ghana) compared to outside', due to a lack of welfare provision providing a safety net for citizens. As the owner of Future Icons FC explained, 'in Ghana unlike let's say Europe, you don't have many options or support when you are out of work and some of the boys you see here are

¹⁵² Interview with Jean Claude Mbvoumin 06/07/2011- FS Paris

¹⁵³ Presentation by Jean-Claude Mbvoumin 06/03/2012- Birkbeck College, University of London

struggling to even get one good meal a day'¹⁵⁴. In Accra, this diffusion of responsibility through a shifting of guidance and care of the self from the state to wider society, allocates the task of both social and individual development upon individuals, households and other informal networks¹⁵⁵. Other researchers have touched upon this topic, particularly the various ways in which the adoption of neo-liberal economic reforms by African countries has encouraged associations, NGO's and other intermediaries to assist and undertake what could be considered as the duties of a state (see Henry & Mohan 2003; Meagher 2005; Meagher 2010; Mohan 2008). In the case of Ghana, since the 1970's when the country began to experience economic decline through to the present-day, the dissolution of liberal welfare policies by various governments has been reasonably consistent (Clark & Manuh 1991; Konadu-Agyemang 2000; Langevang 2008; Loxley 1990; Mohan et al. 2000).

Over the course of numerous training sessions and subsequent discussions with young people at the three clubs, it became increasingly apparent that for most, when they visualized a future in Accra and Ghana more generally, it was a future shrouded in uncertainty. In the absence of liberal welfare governance, the impression amongst youth that they were, or would be solely responsible for their future economic wellbeing was palpable. Accordingly, there was an acute awareness that if they were not doing so already, they would eventually have to assume the lead role in shaping a secure financial future. They imagined this future buttressed not by positive state intervention through welfare and formal employment provision, but as reliant upon their own ingenuity. Subsequently, uncertainty and risk merge within a seemingly never-ending search to grasp potential opportunities and avenues for survival. Kofi, an under-17 player at Future Icons FC touched upon this point as follows.

Outside it is better because you will always get something small from the government but here in Africa that is not the way. If you are in school yes maybe it is ok, but once you have completed [school] you yourself must go out and fend and search for a chance to make your money, because it is not all homes that can accommodate you¹⁵⁶.

¹⁵⁴ James Esson, ethnographic field notes Accra 2011- Future Icons FC

¹⁵⁵ For a discussion on this subject in the context of governing risk in 'Anglo Democracies' please see (Kelly 2001b; Kelly 2001a; Kelly 2006; Kelly 2007)

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Kofi 17/04/2011- Future Icons FC

It is this construction of youthful subjects as being responsible for future life chances, decisions and opportunities within the process of neoliberal governance that underpins the sense of a less than certain future. Samson, an under-17 player at Barracks FC, described how prior to obtaining a mattress in a room with three other people, he endured a traumatic period in which he was homeless. He recounted the harrowing experience of searching Accra for abandoned cars to shelter in, and rummaging through bins for food to eat¹⁵⁷. The topic of finding ways to survive in challenging circumstances surfaced on numerous occasions, and during one such discussion with the under-17 players at Future Icons FC, Kweku articulately explained how this involved actively searching for solutions, and not remaining passive to the uncertainty of your situation.

When we say we are managing we are talking about finding answers to life here in Ghana and the poverty. But it is not easy for somebody to give you the answer because they too are looking and also thinking about their next meal¹⁵⁸.

How then does one decide where to look and which path to follow in order to survive and manage in the midst of this uncertainty? In a previous chapter I highlighted how youth at the three clubs 'dropped out' of formal education during the transition from junior to senior secondary school, and at this 'vital conjuncture' opted for a career in professional football. For these male youth, the West African professional football player, who is able to draw upon his latent sporting bodily capital is the embodiment of the philosophy of 'managing', he becomes his own enterprise, an entrepreneur of self. Additionally, like other studies of young people in contemporary urban Africa (see for example Ferguson 2006; Gough 2008; Langevang & Gough 2009; Porter et al. 2010; Simone 2005), a recurring theme that emerged in the quest to facilitate progress from an uncertain present to an imagined stable future, was the correlation between spatial mobility and a sense of personal progress. Thus, navigating this uncertainty was linked to mental projections of life 'outside', and mobility beyond Ghana.

At this point those aligned with the 'culture of mediocrity' position in the context of West African football migration could counter, and argue that my findings are tied to the nature of the footballing political economy in which the participants reside (discussed in Chapter 6). It is therefore

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Samson, Barracks FC 22/03/2011- Accra

¹⁵⁸ James Esson, ethnographic field notes Accra 2011- Future Icons FC

important to note that Langevang and Gough (2009) in a non sport related study have also observed that young people in Accra claim they survive through movement and spatial mobility. Movement in this context is imbued with meaning, and when meaning is infused to this movement it becomes mobility (see also Cresswell 2010). For young people in Sub-Saharan Africa more broadly, mobility becomes ‘a source of excitement, temptation, inclusion and opportunity’ (Porter et al. 2010, p.796). I would concur, and propose that this conception of movement as being vital to grasping potentially unforeseen opportunities, particularly through migration abroad, goes beyond football as exemplified in the quote below from the owner of the Austin Texans FC.

Based on what we hear and see people think the best way is to go outside. The main thing now is leaving regardless. I have spoken to guys who are currently in their first semester of their fourth year in Legon (University of Ghana). I am talking about guys who are doing well, minimum B students. They are willing to give it all up to get a two-week visa to the US¹⁵⁹.

In the face of uncertainty and what are perceived to be inadequate opportunities in Ghana, many of the young people at all three clubs stated (initially) that they saw migrating to Europe or North America as the route to ‘making it’ and obtaining social mobility. Only Eric, an under-12 player at Barracks FC categorically stated that he wanted to live and work in Ghana in the future. There were some, who claimed they would like to stay but at present saw no discernible reason for doing so, and others who suggested they were keen to leave and return to help their family once they had ‘made it’. Yet the consensus was that ideally, their future would take place outside, a premise founded upon the belief that life ‘there’ is better than ‘here’, but where does this perception emanate?

In the case of Accra, the import of various media, commodities and ideologies from around the world is now argued to be taking place at an unprecedented rate (Langevang 2008; Langevang & Gough 2009). This is argued to provide young people residing in the capital with a greater awareness of lifestyles and consumer culture beyond the country’s borders, thus shaping their impression of life outside. While in Accra, I certainly witnessed evidence to support the validity of this claim, an example being the popularity of Sharpnet Internet Café amongst the players at Barracks FC. In fact one of the most frequent questions at all three Clubs was ‘Kobby do you

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Addae, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra

Facebook’? In addition, understanding the foundations upon which perceptions of life outside derive, emerged during my journeys through Oxford Street in Osu, where I was often unable to avoid being ‘targeted’ by sales people. Although my parents are both Ghanaian and I was born in Accra, the sales people were aware that I either lived in the UK or United States, or had done so previously. Why is this relevant? As highlighted in the previous chapter, return migrants often drive expensive cars, own desirable consumer goods, build large properties and engage in various forms of conspicuous consumption. This perpetuates the idea that travelling outside is a way to obtain wealth and social mobility, an idea prevalent in other parts of West Africa (see Nyamnjoh & Page 2002).

The situation in Accra corresponds with what Kalir (2005) has termed a ‘migratory disposition’, to describe the manner in which people develop the desire to leave through experiences of socioeconomic inequality and expressions of wealth connected to migration. The owner of the Austin Texans FC expressed this point best when describing how even poorly skilled migrants are believed to be capable of earning handsome remuneration abroad.

We all know of illiterates that have gone outside and made money and come back and we see them and what they have been able to do here in Ghana. So now some people even tell me that ‘even if I get a one-minute visa I will be happy’¹⁶⁰.

It would be naïve and erroneous to suggest that the influx of information from beyond the country’s borders, as well as the actions of return migrants, have not influenced the desire to migrate. There is indeed a growing sense that the desire to migrate has intensified. Yet to stop here and reduce the desire to migrate solely to globalization would provide only a partial reading of the situation. For while it is clear that technological advances have changed the speed and nature that certain information and individuals are able to cross borders, as noted by Bayart (2000), African countries have exchanged both ideas, migrants and goods particularly with Europe, but also with Asia and the Americas for quite some time. A point highlighted by Herbert Adika.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Addae, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra

When I finished school at that time we travelled as we had these scholarships from Russia USSR, Cuba, America, Britain, but me for example I didn't fancy travelling. I prefer suffering in Ghana than suffering in somebody else's country. But this generation today, even if you tell them it is difficult there they won't listen they just want to go. When you advise them they will tell you it is because you don't want them to go, they think you want to enjoy it for yourself ¹⁶¹.

An underlying source of this present-day intensification in the desire to migrate amongst these young males, is because for them, life in Accra now involves 'an economy of goods that are known, that may sometimes be seen, that one wants to enjoy, but to which one will never have material access' (Mbembe cited in Ferguson 2006, p.192). It is not just that return migrants and the import of various media, commodities and ideologies from around the world have brought an awareness of global consumer culture and lifestyles. The issue is that this awareness is also accompanied by the belief that such lifestyles are beyond their reach if they stay in Accra.

Similarly to Douala as depicted by Simone (2005), these young males residing in contemporary Accra feel detached from post-independence narratives of national and social development. This is not to suggest that discourses concerning development do not exist in Ghana, as highlighted in the previous chapters they undoubtedly do. The issue is an inability to relate to 'the social memories that had established an interweaving of individual life histories with the prospective and eternal' (ibid 2005, p.518). Ferguson's (2006) assertion that the failure of developmental narratives are not only apparent in the domain of academic theory, but also in the contemporary everyday socioeconomic conditions facing the majority of people residing in the Global South, is highly relevant in Accra. The problem is not that Ghana is not developing. The problem is that it is not developing at an acceptable pace or in a manner in line with their aspirations. It is often the level of development relative to other places and countries, which determine a predisposition towards migration (De Haas 2010). Temporal notions of development no longer placate immediate socioeconomic concerns, as the reassuring pledge that conditions will improve sufficiently with time is no longer trusted.

This suspicion has contributed to a notable shift from a notion of temporal societal development, towards a new faith in development as freedom through the deployment of individual autonomy. For while developmental reforms e.g. Ghana's aforementioned 'Vision 2020' program,

¹⁶¹ Interview with Herbert Adika 28/03/2011- GFA

are inherently concerned with facilitating a future that enables people to achieve a better quality of life at home. Conversely, the primary concern of the young people I met was not the fostering of social interdependency and development, but individual and familial strategies of survival in the midst of economic uncertainty (see also Ferguson 2006; Meagher 2005; Simone 2005). As Godwin, a trainee at Barracks FC explained, the alternative and more favourable solution for improving one's quality of life, is to create a home and life elsewhere.

Some people stay here and still be in the same step and never progress, they don't move forward and it is a waste of time. You have to compare African life to other places, you have to go outside. Because you see the place some people think is hard will be the place you are going to be strong and able to survive and make it¹⁶²

The recourse to migration as a strategy for improving ones circumstances and quality of life is not new (Bakewell 2008), but the practicalities and feasibility of doing so are becoming increasingly challenging. Spatial mobility can be a means of enhancing a person's material condition, but not everyone has an equal relationship with mobility. Godwin and his peers may live in a context 'characterized by ever-expanding connection and communication' (Ferguson 2006, p.192), but they are acutely aware that immigration borders are not particularly porous. Not everyone is able to harness the emancipatory powers of spatial mobility. During my stay in Accra I received several requests from senior and under-17 players at the three clubs for advice on visa applications, and general guidance on overcoming the bureaucracy of international travel. The 'accelerated closure of the West' in the form of tightened immigration rules has fostered the perception that it is almost impossible to acquire a visa using official channels (Langevang & Gough 2009), the probability of doing so was ranked alongside winning the Green Card Lottery. It was assumed that as I was born in Accra but now lived in the UK and was in possession of a 'Red Book' (UK Passport), I must be privy to the secret world of international mobility and its machinations. As the owner of the Austin Texans FC pointed out, this world has its own rules and procedures that are often hard to fathom and decipher. Consequently when you are presented with an opportunity to leave you must take it.

¹⁶² Interview with Godwin, Barracks FC 15/04/2011- Accra

These people in the embassy don't realize what you go through just to get documentation for an interview, but you go to an embassy to get a visa you have everything and just because you don't have travel experience they will tell you that you can't have a visa. How then can you get travel experience? You pay them \$200 for a visa and when they refuse you they don't even give you some of the money back, why is this ok?! Those who are educated and can stand up most of them don't get refused a visa, and if they do they probably don't care too much as they have money or run a company anyway. That is why the moment some of these guys get the visa, even if it is for one week they will never come back, like the guy I told you about who ran away when we went to Denmark. His face looked old you could see he had shaved so much, but his passport said he was 18. The woman at the embassy even asked me, are you sure he is 18? I said honestly, I want this thing to be successful so I am not going to lie to you. He could be 38 he could be 24 I don't know, but all he has shown me is an official passport saying he is 18. How can I dispute it?¹⁶³

The apprehension linked to a curtailment of their mobility through an immigration system that is at best arbitrary, and at worst plutocratic, creates a sense of frustration, exclusion and despair that further fetishizes foreign climes and reinforces their appeal. In the words of Mo, an under-17 player at Future Icons FC, 'when you reach [outside] I'm sure you will understand and see that the struggle was worth it. If going is difficult, it is because the rewards there are so great'¹⁶⁴. Instead of anticipating the development and transformation of their lives within Accra, the city becomes a platform for actualizing some form of escape (see also Simone 2005). As alluded to by the actions of the Austin Texans FC player who absconded while on a team trip to Denmark, and demonstrated from findings in the previous chapters, football is now considered a realistic means to assist in this escape. In fact, it is not just football. The 'disappearance' of several members of various African teams for 'economic reasons' during the London 2012 Olympic games, including from Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo, suggests that sports more generally are now a means to gain passage abroad.

The international movement of African football players as previously discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, is structured around transfers between clubs in almost every corner of the globe. Importantly for young people in Accra and other parts of West Africa, these transfers can also take on the role of migratory channels, offering opportunities for spatial mobility. The circulation of players within the industry is financially beneficial to clubs and individual speculators. Thus football academies are not only increasingly prevalent in Accra and other parts of West Africa, but also progressively

¹⁶³ Interview with Addae, Austin Texans FC 21/04/2011- Accra

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Mo, Future Icons FC 10/04/2011- Accra

geared towards the grooming and export of players to foreign clubs through an expanding spatial field of talent scouts and recruitment agents (Darby et al. 2007; Poli 2010). This process does not only involve football transfers, but competing in international tournaments and trials also provides openings to bypass an arbitrary and perplexingly bureaucratic immigration process, and thus obtain documents to enable migration abroad.

The creation of clubs and academies in West Africa, does much more than provide outlets to satisfy the desire to become a professional football player and migrate, it actively reproduces it¹⁶⁵. The current desire to both 'play by force and leave by force' has arisen because social and mental structures are in agreement and reinforcing each other. The structural logic of a football industry that promotes movement as a prerequisite to success coalesces with the migratory disposition of young people in West Africa. Problematically, migration through football can also reduce autonomy, through the imposition of unfavourable transfer and travel conditions (see also Darby 2010; Poli 2010), and it is in this context that exploitative and irregular migratory practices are able to occur.

7.3 Chasing the dream, catching the reality

The idea that migration through football can reduce an individual's autonomy and lead to exploitative practices is best grasped through a real life example. The story of Gerard, a sixteen-year-old Guinean migrant residing in Paris, who I met through CFS, offers a suitable case study. Although Gerard's experience contains nuances unique to his personal situation and background, his trajectory to Europe typifies that of other migrants, thus making it a good case to bring the migratory process to life.

¹⁶⁵ Poli (2010) observed similar findings in the Côte d'Ivoire

Gerard's story¹⁶⁶

I was first seen playing for my neighbourhood team...there is a championship at the end of each season and scouts from the Star of Guinea saw me and asked me to play there as a reserve. I didn't start (matches) but if someone was injured I got to play, but it is a good deal because you can't sign an official contract until you are seventeen so that means you can still sign for another side if you get an offer. Eventually I got to play for the Star of Guinea [and] that is where the agent found me.

It was during a league game when the agent found me and said he wanted to take me to Europe... He (agent) went to my uncle because my mother is ill and my parents divorced when I was a young child, and so my uncle is head of the family... He (uncle) also knows about football so the agent talked to him and made the deal... He (uncle) played football when he was younger and when he was playing he was able to take care of the whole family... [He] played for the national team so I would see him on television...[and] ever since I was young I wanted to play football. I wanted to be the next one in the family to be able to do that (support the family) and my mother and my uncle were hoping that I could do the same so they had to take up this chance... My uncle never thought the agent would fuck us over like this! My mother ended up selling most of the family land to pay to send me to Europe...They paid the agent €3,500 plus €1,000 as pocket money...he said it was for the plane tickets and everything... I was 16 on December 11th 2010 and the agent brought me to Europe on December 19th. I was lucky they were able to send the money quickly because the agent said if they didn't hurry he wasn't going to take me.

When I first came it wasn't Paris proper I was in the suburbs, the agent put me in a hotel and he would come and visit everyday to make sure I was okay. The room was in his (agents) name and all the papers like my passport and travel documents the agent had them...[He had] my passport, my papers from the football federation in Guinea, papers from my education and my pocket money, everything. The agent told me that on January 14th I was going to Lyon to try out for some academies but after the 13th he stopped coming. I waited through to the night of the 17th and when the agent didn't come the manager of the hotel said I had to go, but because I was still a minor he took me as far as Charles de Gaulle Étoile metro station and bought me a ticket to get to the 18th arrondissement, where there is a government centre, thinking that I could get help there. By the time I got there it was late and they said they couldn't help me so they gave me the address for a place where homeless people gather and a bus comes and takes them to a shelter. But (at the shelter) they only took people they knew and I didn't know anyone so I couldn't get on the bus.

Luckily I was near to République and there was a group of people at a different shelter so I hung out with them, and they said that there were also buses that came there to take people to sleep somewhere. But they didn't take minors so I had to lie and say I was older. There were over two hundred people there for three buses and one bus only takes fifty people so if you're lucky you get a bus if not you find somewhere else to sleep...It was mid January so it was freezing cold but I got on the third bus and had something to eat and stayed somewhere just outside

¹⁶⁶ Extracts from the interview with Gerard 12/07/2011 (Guinean)

of Paris. The next day I had a meeting with the social services who take care of minors in Paris...They put me in some accommodation and took care of me and things were good for the next month or so but I didn't tell all my family...I told my sister and a cousin but not my mother because it would devastate her, she is already very sick. I didn't have my papers to confirm my age so they made me do a bone test to verify my age...they told me that the results said I was eighteen years old...I was kicked out of the hotel the social service agency had been keeping me in because they only deal with minors...

Gerard's account draws attention to many of the key practices that take place during the irregular migratory process, as illustrated in the step-by-step summary of irregular football migration provided below. I formulated the summary using secondary data sources¹⁶⁷ and primary data obtained in Accra and Paris.

1. An intermediary purporting to be a football agent or talent scout identifies a player in West Africa (if possible genuinely under the age of 18 or at least with a 'football age' of less than 18 years) at a match, trial or 'Justify' and offers him the opportunity to be recruited by a foreign club. An important and key finding in this research is that the intermediary does not have to physically meet the player. The Internet now provides opportunities to recruit players remotely.
2. The intermediary asks the player for money in exchange for securing this opportunity akin to a 'finders fee', but also to cover costs such as travel to and accommodation in the destination country. The player's immediate and extended family often sell family possessions, remove siblings from schooling or take out a loan to meet the costs, often in the region of €3-5,000
3. The player arrives in a destination country, in most cases with a one-month tourist visa. Contrary to popular media coverage the travel conditions are often not illegal and dangerous (e.g. travelling as a ship stowaway in excessively long journeys). Players often arrive using legal channels, and in the instances where they do not, it is often via traditional modes of transportation with false travel documents. On arrival the intermediary often takes the player's documents and any spending money for 'safe keeping'.
4. While in a destination country, the player may or may not attend a trial with the club promised by the intermediary. In some cases he may be taken to multiple trials in different countries as part of a

¹⁶⁷ Darby (2010), European Commission White Paper on Sport (2007), European Commission Study on Sport (2009), Poli (2010) and Simons (2010)

group until a contract is offered and the agent is satisfied with the terms.

5. If the trials are successful the player signs a contract with the club. However, the contract is often of a short-term, insecure nature with unfavorable financial terms, enabling the intermediary an opportunity to earn a commission from facilitating multiple transfers. This situation is often attributed to the limited educational attainment of the players e.g. the player at Barracks FC who was prepared to split any future earnings 60/50 with his agent (this is not a typo).
6. If the player is unsuccessful at his trials, or his contract is not renewed with his existing club and another one cannot be found, the intermediary abandons him. Often taking the player's documentation and any remaining money with him. Once the precarious nature of his situation is realized, the player is often too ashamed to return home, and remains in the destination country illegally without any means of subsistence.

The process as outlined above appears to comply with the definition of trafficking as outlined in the Palermo Protocol (highlighted in the literature review). It features an *act* such as the recruitment and transportation of others, which is followed by the *methods* used to enforce those act(s), such as threat, the use of force, fraud, coercion or other abuses of power or of a position of vulnerability. It then relates to a *motive* i.e. principally for the purpose of financial gain through exploitation. In some extremely rare cases, players embarking on clandestine journeys do indeed have legitimate training contracts in place with a foreign club, and while such an act better fits the description of smuggling, as discussed in the literature review, it is referred to as trafficking in football. In the vast majority of cases the alleged interest from a foreign club is a charade, and once in the destination country and having appropriated his 'finders fee' the football agent abandons the player. This is known as trafficking through football. Both forms of migration are conflated under the umbrella term football trafficking, or as it is sometimes referred to in the academic context, 'moving without the ball'.

This association between the football industry and the irregular migration of West African youth has captivated academic, media and political interest (Bennhold 2006; Guest 2009; McDougall 2008; McDougall 2010; Scherrens 2007). Michel Platini, former French international and current President of UEFA, highlighted the concern regarding this association amongst leading figures involved with football governance.

Today, in the world and in Europe, there is trafficking of children. I will not mince my words because the situation is serious. What else do you call a phenomenon whereby children aged 12 or 13 are torn away from their environment and culture to join a business in return for payment? This is what is happening in football (UEFA 2008).

Furthermore, FIFA President Joseph Sepp Blatter stated how

It is our duty to the youth of the world to protect young players. We must do it together. Stop slavery of these young players! (FIFA 2009)

As indicated by the quotes above, FIFA have shown concern about the subject of football trafficking. This was evident from as early as March 2001, when FIFA President Joseph Sepp Blatter attempted to move beyond his previous criticisms of the issue, which were deemed political rhetoric, by implementing changes with regards to the Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players (RSTP). Although the majority of clubs have now found loopholes and methods to evade them, the governing body did introduce sanctions and regulations to ‘protect the human rights of minors’, by restricting clubs from purchasing and signing players under the age of 18¹⁶⁸ (FIFA 2003). Additionally, a regulatory measure termed the ‘6+5 rule’ was proposed, which while allowing clubs to recruit foreign players, required that they have at least six players on the pitch who are eligible to play for the nation associated with the league. It is argued that this will encourage clubs to sign ‘home grown players’ rather than indulging in international transfers, therefore reducing demand for cheaper overseas labour (FIFA 2009). A cynical reading of FIFA’s strategy could argue that this creates a system of differential mobility, which weakens the leverage of the already disenfranchised, control over mobility reveals and also reinforces power disparities (Massey 1991; Sharma 2005). The policies could potentially produce a group of players vulnerable to exploitation within the labour market, benefitting clubs through the provision of a weakened labour force.

An alternative approach is provided by CFS, who unsuccessfully sought to reduce cases of football trafficking by altering the practices of clubs through the promotion of an ‘Ethical Transfer Charter¹⁶⁹’ (which is only applicable to minors). This Ethical Transfer Charter operates in a manner

¹⁶⁸ At the time, regulated in Article 12(a) of the 2001 FIFA RSTP, which formed the basis for Article 19 of the 2005 FIFA RSTP which was revised in Article 19 of the 2009 FIFA RSTP.

¹⁶⁹ A copy can be found at <http://www.footsolidaire.org/articles/article/69>

akin to Fair Trade agreements for products such as coffee and diamonds, as clubs that signed up would agree to only sign players who had been 'ethically sourced'¹⁷⁰. Both FIFA and CFS were attempting to target the demand for young West African players, and vicariously football trafficking. Andrijasevic and Anderson (2009) note that campaigns and regulations targeting the 'demand' for trafficked persons have two potential recipients for their strategy, the consumers of goods and services produced or performed by trafficked people (e.g. football fans, TV broadcasters and sponsors) and the employers or labour users of trafficked people (football clubs). They argue that the difficulty with this approach is that we cannot target employer demand for trafficked labour per se, nor consumer demand for goods or services produced or performed by trafficked people (Andrijasevic & Anderson 2009). It is not inconceivable that demand does indeed exist within and beyond the football industry for cheap and exploitable labour, which undercuts minimum labour standards, and that this correlates with a demand for young foreign nationals because they are easier to control (see Alegi 2010; Poli 2010; Poli 2006). Yet this does not mean clubs equate their need for cheaper labour, with a need for trafficked labour.

It is therefore possible that there are few willing signatories to the 'Ethical Transfer Charter', and scant recognition for FIFA regulations because clubs see no need in agreeing to stop engaging in player trafficking, if they do not consider themselves involved in this activity to begin with. Robert, a twenty-three year old Cameroonian, stressed this point when discussing his experiences with German Bundesliga side Hertha Berlin, where problems arose for him and four fellow trialists because the club attempted to act appropriately and in the best interests of the players.

He (agent) got us the trial at Hertha Berlin, we got there and there was an argument between the agent and the club. The agent wanted the club to sign us without our parent's involvement but we were under age you understand? All of these professional clubs, when you take a kid like that and they want to sign you, they want to make sure that the parents are involved and have signed the correct documents. They want to see that everything is well taken care of. The club thought that we were going back to Cameroon because we didn't sign a contract but the agent wanted us to travel to Italy, Belgium and other places to do some trials and things like that. Then maybe he was also thinking that we would face the same problem he had with Hertha Berlin. So that is the thing. He has to run away because there was no way he was going

¹⁷⁰ Presentation by Jean-Claude Mbvoumin 06/03/2012- Birkbeck College, University of London

to take us back to Cameroon, so along the line things broke down and the agent ran away and we were abandoned in a hotel¹⁷¹.

During my time in Paris speaking with young people, from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon who had been involved in irregular forms of football migration, the issue of concern was often not the practices of clubs (associated with trafficking in football). Instead their concern was treatment by immigration officials and social services in destination countries. This in many ways was linked to the manner in which football trafficking has been brought to public policy attention as a pressing new social problem. As indicated in the above quotes from CFS and FIFA, and discussed in the literature review chapter, the situation matches Joel Best's (1999) general model of the social and political construction of new crimes and new victims (Davidson 2011). Best argued that in order for a given phenomenon to be acknowledged and treated as a grave and imminent problem, social activists 'almost always argue that victimization is very common, stress that victimization is consequential, and present victimization as relatively straightforward and unambiguous, 'the victimizer is exploitative, the victim is innocent' (Best 1999 cited in Davidson 2011, p.458).

Accordingly, campaign materials, policy documents, newspaper reports and documentaries lend credence to claims about the vast size of the problem by listing the many abuses and problems football trafficked migrants experience (homelessness, labour exploitation and enforced criminal activity etc). This is now common practice in trafficking discourses, where there is also reference to slavery and child prostitution (for example Haynes 2008; Lindberg 2006; McDougall 2010; McDougall 2008; Rawlinson 2009). Emphasizing the connection between football trafficking and the sex industry serves to reinforce the severity of consequences allied to this practice, and to demarcate those involved as either 'victims' (young players) or 'villains' (duplicious football agents). This position corresponds with academic critiques of child trafficking discourses, which suggest that unlike adults where controversies often hinge on questions of choice, if a child is recruited and transported for purposes of exploitation, they have been trafficked no matter if they consented to the move (Anderson 2007a; Bastia 2005; Berman 2003; Davidson 2011; Ruhs & Anderson 2010). As alluded to by Michel Platini, football trafficking involves children being 'torn' from a seemingly positive or at least neutral environment free from exploitation, and placed in dangerous situations. Thus contrary to the findings in this and

¹⁷¹ Interview with Robert-10/07/2011 (Cameroonian)

previous chapters, agency and the attainment of social mobility through migration is explicitly rejected as the background context for the football trafficked migrant's current situation.

The agency of migrants within popular narratives of football trafficking takes a particular form, as unlike adult migrants who actively seek to make a better life for themselves or to escape poverty, the (child) migrant within football trafficking has 'object like been removed, transported and put to use for purposes of exploitation' (Davidson 2011, p.463). As noted by Salt (2000), trafficking challenges traditional conceptions of migration by blurring the boundaries between forced and voluntary migration movements, and the degree of choice able to be exercised by the migrant. This premise is particularly problematic, as the underlying preoccupation with children (those under the age 18) as evidenced in FIFA's regulations and media coverage, incorporates dominant Western discourses of trafficking that see women and children as victims, defined by their innocence and vulnerability to exploitation. Thus the notion of an unaccompanied child migrant becomes an oxymoron that disturbs the victim-agency binary. To speak of child migrants is to bring together what are often disparate social categories (Davidson 2011). This denial of agency is also characteristic of feminist abolitionists stance on prostitution, as they recognise no distinction between 'forced' and 'free choice prostitution' (Anderson & Andrijasevic 2008; Doezema 2005). Those partaking in the sex industry are not smuggled into states as this insinuates some form of complicity, they must therefore be trafficked, as no woman could genuinely consent to prostitution.

I am not arguing that prostitution is comparable to playing football for a European club, yet like the feminist abolitionist stance on prostitution, the young people who become embroiled in football trafficking must like wise be passive victims, whose decision making skills have been rendered null and void i.e. they must have been trafficked. Consequently, an issue highlighted by several interviewees and at the training camp in Bel-Air, was that having technically managed to migrate independently of their parents- deemed indicative of undertaking adult like responsibilities- they no longer matched the stereotype of a trafficking victim. Furthermore, given the aforementioned proclivity for age falsification amongst West African players in the football industry, their claim to be under 18 years of age was often disputed by French immigration and social services¹⁷². Gerard's experience was indicative of this

¹⁷² Armand 25/07/2011 (Ivorian); Gerard 12/07/2011 (Guinean); Robert 10/07/2011 (Cameroonian); Adam-25/07/2011 (Ivorian); Ismail 24/07/2011 (Ivorian); Pierre 28/07/2011 (Cameroonian) and Patrick 28/07/2011

situation, below he describes how having been abandoned by his agent in a hotel on the outskirts of Paris with no money or identification, he was asked to take a bone test to confirm he was 16 years of age.

At first I didn't have my papers to confirm my age so I had to do a bone test to verify that I was a underage, but I was sure of myself and that I hadn't lied about my age so I was happy to do it. So on February 11th 2011 they did the bone test, after quite a lot of backwards and forwards over whether they were going to do it. I went with another guy who fled before doing the test because he was scared. In fact my papers arrived from Guinea around February 11th, so the director of the social services agency I was working with had my paper work, but still insisted that I should do the test. When you go for the bone test at the hospital normally you get the results the next day, but I didn't get the results until two weeks afterwards and then they told me that the results said I was eighteen years old.

I told them that it was bullshit and I didn't have eighteen years. I never saw the results so I don't know what was going on with that, but I was kicked out of the hotel the social service agency had been keeping me in because they only deal with minors, and I was older than eighteen according to the bone test. So I slept in the metro station at Bastille and in the morning went to an agency which deals with refugees and asylum seekers, and I basically threw my bag in this woman's office and told her that they take all of these other people, but you don't take me and I need somewhere to sleep. I asked them who could help as they weren't willing to and they gave me Jean Claude's number.¹⁷³

Attempts were made to repatriate Gerard, however when his case was sent for judicial review the judge declared that his documents from Guinea were valid, and he was allowed to remain in Paris indefinitely. Ismail, an Ivorian migrant who was also abandoned by a football agent without attending a single trial went through a similar process. However unlike Gerard, despite also having no money and documentation Ismail avoided homelessness through a chance encounter with a member of the Ivorian Diaspora. The clerk at the hotel where he was abandoned gave him €20 and advised him to go to La Chappelle, known for its large Ivorian community. That same day someone noticed Ismail crying and appearing distressed in a park, the person was an old friend from primary school, who Ismail had not seen nor heard from in over a decade. He attributed the kindness and advice of the hotel clerk and the subsequent chance meeting with his former school friend, to placing his faith in a positive outcome in the hands of Allah¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Interview with Gerard 12/07/2011 (Guinean)

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Ismail 24/07/2011 (Ivorian)

It is clear from Gerard's case, that a 'Victim of trafficking' (VoT) or perhaps more specifically a 'Victim of Football Trafficking' (VoFT) is thus both an administrative category entailing certain state protections and obligations towards individuals, and a descriptive term applied by NGOs and other civil society actors to people who have certain sets of experiences. Those who fit the descriptive term do not necessarily fall into the administrative category (see also Anderson 2007a; Samers 2003). This placed the young people I encountered in a predicament. In order to be offered the rights associated with being a VoFT, they had to meet the administrative category, yet responding to a trafficked person is administratively and financially costly to a destination country (Anderson 2007a). Having overstayed their tourist visa and being unable to verify their status as a minor meant that in the eyes of French Immigration, they were simply male adults illegally residing in Paris. This transition from having status as a minor to an adult is key, because unlike women and children, adult male irregular migrants are often attributed with agency and therefore do not match the category of VoT, instead they match the category of a smuggled migrant (Nieuwenhuys & Pecoud 2007). Smuggled migrants are not entitled to any of the special protections that states are legally required to make available to VoT. There is no obligation placed on states to consider the human rights of smuggled migrants when repatriating them (Anderson 2007a).

Repatriation also becomes an option even if it could not be proven that the person was over 18 years old, but there was verifiable evidence that they had been trafficked. This was the situation facing Armand and Adam, two Ivorian migrants who were told they had no justification for seeking to remain in France when their tourist visas expired (this was also the situation faced by the vast majority of young people I encountered in Bel-Air). Firstly, their tourist visa was not valid for the purposes of their visit, secondly their situation was simply an unfortunate case of labour migration gone badly wrong, and thus once again the outcome was repatriation to their country of origin¹⁷⁵. This is not considered an acceptable option, and accordingly they opted to stay in Paris illegally. The unwillingness to return home is often attributed to the shame their situation will bring in their local community, particularly as extended family members often fund their trip¹⁷⁶ (see also Alegi 2010; Haynes 2008; McDougall 2008; McDougall 2010; Rawlinson

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Armand 25/07/2011 (Ivorian) and interview with Adam 25/07/2011 (Ivorian)

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Jean Claude Mbvoumin 06/07/2011- CFS Paris and Presentation by Jean-Claude Mbvoumin 06/03/2012- Birkbeck College, University of London

2009). There is some truth to this claim, as many of the young people I spoke to were ashamed and embarrassed about their stories, and felt they had destroyed the lives of family members in their country of origin. For example, Gerard's mother is disabled and unable to work. She sold all of her inherited land to pay the football agent and can no longer afford to pay her medical bills, or take care of his three younger siblings, one of whom also suffers from a disability. In the quote below, Gerard describes the internal turmoil this caused him.

The only thing that matters to me is taking care of my mother and this is why I am anguished here in Paris. They don't have the medicine in my country to treat her and even the medicine they do have comes from Senegal and it is very expensive, and the way she would have paid for it is through the inheritance she sold so that I could come to Europe... So I need to help her somehow...[but] I feel like I cannot help her and she keeps losing her sight and she is ill and it is killing me, and I just need to do something as fast as possible to be able to help her. My dream is to earn enough money to try and bring her here but God is the only one who can determine what we do in life¹⁷⁷

Participants suggested that this sense of shame amongst fellow migrants was the main reason Jean-Claude struggled to find people willing to talk about their experiences. Adam explained this point as follows.

It is very hard to find someone who will want to explain what happened to them. You see the way it is, it is the situation. They are ashamed, this situation is not easy, African people are very proud so for them to talk about their situation is very difficult. Me I understand that people are ashamed of their story, sometimes they have left their family who sacrificed everything to send them...[but] you can't go back because it is not going to help anyone¹⁷⁸.

Alongside the narratives of shame often documented in media coverage and policy documents, there was another key and related reason for a disinclination towards repatriation, an explanation that is often missing in popular accounts as to why they decided to remain illegally. As Robert explained below, in comparison to life in their origin countries, Europe is by far the more preferable option.

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Gerard 12/07/2011 (Guinean)

¹⁷⁸ interview with Adam 25/07/2011 (Ivorian)

You know in Cameroon we have two parts of the country, one is the English speaking and one is the French speaking. So Bamenda¹⁷⁹ is the English speaking part, that is where I grew up, that is my province. I was picked for a academy in Douala where they send the really good players and Douala is very dirty, you can't even breathe well because of all the things that are around and all the dirty things.

I left Cameroon with the agent when I was like at the age of lets just say seventeen, like that, and Berlin was a pure different life. If you leave Cameroon and come to Berlin I am telling you never in your life would you want to go back. Also there is no hope that if we go back [Cameroon] we are going to come back again [Europe] or that we are going to make it better back home.

So when the agent abandoned us in the hotel we stayed. Now I can even speak to you in German as I was there for four years without papers before coming here (Paris). But my case is a little different because I have a father in France, and that is also a long story you know. My mother was pregnant with me and then along the line this man abandoned her, this man he was a French and that was what my mother told me. So while when I was in Germany I found him and he said there is no need to go back home (Cameroon) and he will recognise me and sign a document saying I was his child. I signed some papers and I am in the position right now to have French nationality¹⁸⁰.

This is not to suggest that migrants with irregular status residing in Europe, or more specifically Paris, live an easy or stigma free existence. As noted by McGregor, the insecurity surrounding one's immigration status 'shapes personal health, the capacity to rebuild private and public domains of life, but also attitudes towards the law, justice, belonging and citizenship' (2011, p.598). When I finished interviewing Armand and Adam and they offered to walk me to the Metro station, they discussed how a few years ago even this simple act would have been fraught with danger. If a policeman were to stop us on the way and ask to see identification, it would not bode well for them. With time they learnt to manage, but not fully overcome, this sense of trepidation that followed each step beyond the safe confines of their Aunt's flat- a member of the Ivorian Diaspora who heard of their plight and offered them accommodation in her home. Furthermore, their status made it difficult to play for a good amateur, let alone professional football team. Armand explained how a scout spotted him while playing in Bel-Air, however the club was reluctant to sign him due to his immigration status. Adam and Armand both left the Côte d'Ivoire in pursuit of upward

¹⁷⁹ Prior to World War I Bamenda was under German colonial rule, however Robert made no mention of this and Germany was one of several countries the agent planned to send him.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Robert 10/07/2011 (Cameroonian)

social mobility through football, yet they found themselves on a downward trajectory.

Armand and Adam both claimed to be less than twenty years of age (17 and 19 respectively), yet there was a belief that life was passing them by. This was accompanied by a perception that opportunities to engage in normative practices associated with hegemonic ideals of manhood were diminishing. A career, owning a home, marriage and children were not currently on their agenda¹⁸¹. Their inability to participate in these practices compounded their sense of shame and fuelled perceptions of stunted progression to a respectable adulthood. Armand used two high profile American athletes to articulate this point in a unique and novel way.

I played football because I know that if I achieve in that sport, it can open for me a lot of doors that I cannot open if I do a normal job. If you reach a certain status people can say what they want but we are in a world where the money runs things...Look at Michael Jordan and Tiger Woods, money has abolished the idea that they are black. It doesn't make them white but they earn so much money that they get respect, so you might see little white kids with a Michael Jordan jersey and their parents might be racist but they don't see Michael Jordan as a black person, they just see him as a successful man. He has the money and respect¹⁸².

They could not however share this sense of a less than certain future with family members and friends in the Côte d'Ivoire. Not only because of the aforementioned sense of shame and embarrassment, but because on the few occasions they had dared to disclose their plight, people were not convinced by their depiction of life in Paris. This links to a point I made earlier, that alongside narratives of shame is the impression that regardless of their current situation, they are better off in Europe. The following extract from a conversation between myself, Robert and Jules (both originally from Cameroon) best articulated this point¹⁸³.

RT- In Africa they believe like I said that Europe is paradise. Everybody living in Europe is in a good condition. But here you look around you and see people who are really facing difficulties.

JE- So when you tell your family in Cameroon this what do they say?

¹⁸¹ Interview with Armand 25/07/2011 (Ivorian) and interview with Adam 25/07/2011 (Ivorian)

¹⁸² Interview with Armand 25/07/2011 (Ivorian)

¹⁸³ Interview with Jules (Cameroonian) and Interview with Robert (Cameroonian) 10/07/2011- Paris

- RT- They don't believe you! Well your family maybe understands, but your friends well your friends no, no way.
- JS- They will tell you, if it is as you say, then why do you stay there?
- RT- Yeah when you tell your family they will probably accept. But you tell your friends? They say no way man, if it is hard you yourself come back.
- JS- Yes they will ask you, 'why you don't come back'?
- RT- They say, 'if it is so hard why do you want to stay there'?
- JE- So what do you say?
- RT- You are stuck. There is nothing you can say again. They have caught you. They say if things are so difficult then you come back.

Other interviewees made similar points, with Gerard commenting on how as children, he and his friends in Guinea believed life in Europe entailed fun and leisure, as evidenced by events such as the Tour de France.

We saw things on TV like the Tour de France where people are paid to cycle everywhere and other people are standing around watching them during the daytime. I used to think wow, it looked to us like people in Europe didn't have to work and that they are able to have fun and hang around because life there is just easier¹⁸⁴

These and other similar discussions resonated with 'White Man Kontri' discourses, and the associated construction of 'an imagined geography that elides spaces of the West with worlds of material consumption as the basis of an enduring dream' (Nyamnjoh & Page 2002, p.628). According to Jean-Claude Mbvoumin, stories revealing the plight facing young people remaining in Europe illegally are prevented from returning to origin countries by the discerning allure of life in the West.

CFS now believe that regulation of clubs by FIFA is not an effective way to prevent football trafficking, as regulation without a serious mechanism to ensure enforcement is meaningless. The Ethical Charter is also considered unlikely to make a noticeable difference, given that it has existed for almost a decade with little or no significant impact either in terms of signatories and numbers of trafficked players. Even addressing the so-called 'culture of mediocrity', which policymakers consider imperative, is deemed unachievable in the short to medium term by CFS. Instead, the organization now proposes that the most effective strategy would be to focus on limiting the supply of potential VoFT. This would take place through a region wide anti-trafficking

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Gerard (Guinean) 12/07/2011- Paris

media campaign (TV, radio and print) using high profile West African players, such as Didier Drogba (Côte d'Ivoire), Samuel E'too (Cameroon) and Michael Essien (Ghana) to warn young people about the perils of using an unlicensed agent, and the exploitation that takes place during football trafficking¹⁸⁵.

In addition to the media campaign, which includes a documentary film titled 'Soka Africa' highlighting the story of two VoFT, CFS are also planning to create information centres in West African countries. The centres will have staff specially trained to educate young people, academies and clubs about the football industry and the associated risks involved with football related migration¹⁸⁶. The use of awareness campaigns to inform potential migrants about the risks associated with irregular forms of migration is an increasingly popular strategy amongst anti-trafficking activists and policy makers more generally (Andrijasevic & Anderson 2009; Anderson & Andrijasevic 2008; Nieuwenhuys & Pecoud 2007; Sharma 2003). Similarly to the arguments put forth by CFS, a key justification of trafficking awareness campaigns lies in the belief that traffickers prosper on potential migrants false hopes of a better life abroad¹⁸⁷. By raising awareness of the harsh realities of life in destination countries and the risks of migration, false illusions of life, particularly in Europe, can be countered. It was argued by CFS that football trafficking occurs due to a lack of information about the football industry, and what awaits young migrants in destination countries- if they knew they would change their behaviour accordingly.

Interestingly, my interviews with West African youth from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Cameroon who have been involved in irregular football migration, painted a far more ambivalent picture regarding the feasibility of this strategy. These young people all without fail suggested that an awareness campaign should take place, yet the effectiveness of such an approach was simultaneously dismissed for the following three key reasons. Firstly, it was argued that information documenting the risks associated with football trafficking was likely to be ineffectual, as it would be deemed as biased. If for example African VoFT were to return and provide the information, people would assume that it was merely a tactic to prevent them from traveling and also 'enjoying the West', as the VoFT presumably had done before they

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Jean Claude Mbvoumin 06/07/2011- CFS and Presentation by Jean-Claude Mbvoumin 06/03/2012- Birkbeck College, University of London

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Jean Claude Mbvoumin 06/07/2011- CFS and Presentation by Jean-Claude Mbvoumin 06/03/2012- Birkbeck College, University of London

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Jean Claude Mbvoumin 06/07/2011- CFS and Presentation by Jean-Claude Mbvoumin 06/03/2012- Birkbeck College, University of London

returned¹⁸⁸. Participants in Ghana also referred to this idea of enjoying foreign climes. Additionally, as I became all too aware, many of those involved in football trafficking are not keen to share their stories, due to the dread of deportation and associated fear that they would be unable to return to Europe. Yet if African migrants with travel documents were to return and provide the information, it would again be suggested that they were merely scaremongering in an attempt to prevent others enjoying the West, as Robert stated earlier ‘if it is so bad, then you come back’.

Iya Traore, a Guinean professional football free stylist and former academy player at FC Paris St Germaine, who is famous for his performances outside the Sacre-Coeur Basilica, explained how during visits to Guinea he often attempts to advise young people at his academy ¹⁸⁹about the challenges of living in Europe. This information is acknowledged but simultaneously ignored¹⁹⁰.



Fig 24: Iya at Sacre-Coeur Basilica
(source http://www.iya.fr/en/iya_bio.php/)

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Armand 25/07/2011 (Ivorian); Gerard 12/07/2011 (Guinean); Robert 10/07/2011 (Cameroonian); Adam 25/07/2011 (Ivorian) and Ismail 24/07/2011 (Ivorian)

¹⁸⁹ Iya was keen to stress that his academy is for recreational purposes only, and that he is not interested in player sales and transfers.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Iya Traore (Guinean) 30/07/2011- Paris

This resonates with arguments claiming that for young people in West Africa, Europe is beguiling in its ambivalence (see Nyamnjoh and Page 2002). They are aware that their perception of Europe as holding the key to success is defective, as both media coverage and verification from those who have travelled provide a counter narrative to the veil of perfection in which they shroud Europe. Yet as indicated above, this often provokes doubt in the messenger not the message. Participants argued that in order for the proposed information centres to be taken seriously and deemed a legitimate venture, they would need to involve local people residing in their respective African country, or as a last resort, white people. The use of professional football players to spearhead the campaign was considered even more ineffectual, for the very reason it was argued by CFS that they were suitable. They are rich, powerful and thus iconic figures in West Africa, with the potential to reach a wide socio-political audience. They are in many ways the embodiment of hegemonic masculinity many of these young people aspire to attain. What CFS fails to consider is that a key factor as to why Drogba, E'too and Essien are perceived to have attained this success, is *because* they left Africa.

The second argument as to why information centres and awareness campaigns were likely to be ineffectual, was linked to an inaccurate apprehension of the broader rationale underpinning how young people in West Africa understand risk when making decisions. As highlighted in a previous chapter, contemporary research emphasises the importance of individual action, contextual constraints, and collective understandings and values when conceptualising how risk is perceived and assessed. In awareness campaigns such as that proposed by CFS, risk is imbued with negative connotations and synonymous with danger, yet in the previous chapter I highlighted how a more value-neutral interpretation, reflective of subjective disposition is needed. When young people in Accra sought opportunities to migrate and assessed whom to trust and go with amidst unpredictability and uncertainty, the answer to this predicament was, 'you have to try your luck'. This connotated a frame of mind, a temperament and associated forms of practice associated with perceptions of causality and associated risk taking. It emanates from the notion of 'managing', and resonates with 'dubriagem'¹⁹¹ in Guinea Bissau (Vigh 2006; Vigh 2010) and 'débrouille' in Cameroon (Waage 2006). These expressions are used by young people in their respective countries to describe the ability to improvise using accessible resources, and

¹⁹¹ A Creole word that originates from the French 'se débrouiller', which can be translated as 'to get by or get the best out of a situation' (Vigh 2006, p.117).

amend strategies and plans according to opportunities and constraints. The world view these expressions reflect entails attempting to make calculated decisions and behaving in a judicious manner, despite often lacking the privilege of being able to base these calculations on discrete and stable variables (Langevang & Gough 2009).

When I asked the interviewees in Paris whether more information detailing the risks associated with football migration, particularly instances of football trafficking would make a noticeable difference, their response was a resounding no. As Jules explains below, someone else's failure has little bearing on the likelihood of your own, particularly if one believes in a higher power or entity, as for example Ismail did when he was abandoned.

No, no, no it won't really make a difference [more information]. The way it is is that everybody thinks that success is something that belongs to them and they can succeed and they will have their own luck. You can see somebody fail but you don't stop just because somebody else failed. You say ok, yes that person failed but me I have my chance and I with God's help I will make it¹⁹².

Hernández-Carretero (2009) notes that religious beliefs and spirituality, particularly the belief in divine determination, are likely to act as factors mediating individual perception of risk in the decision whether or not to migrate. The notion of risk that underpins anti-trafficking campaigns such as that proposed by CFS is related to a preoccupation with removing the control of future outcomes from the grasp of fate and the migrant's own decision making. Yet this approach makes little sense in a context where as highlighted in this and the previous chapter, causality is perceived to be predetermined by the will of a higher entity, and/or invisible supernatural forces that interact with the material world and influence life chances and everyday activities. These forces can be manipulated to an individual's advantage, through the use of rituals and or artefacts, functioning as a form of 'risk minimisation techniques' with apotropaic powers¹⁹³. It is not therefore a case of risk being inconsequential, rather it becomes an issue of mediation, rather than avoidance.

The third argument as to why football trafficking awareness campaigns will be ineffectual brings us back to the discussion and argument presented in the opening section of this chapter. This strategy fails to take into consideration 'how individual agency interacts with wider, structural and

¹⁹² Interview with Jules (Cameroonian) 10/07/2011- Paris

¹⁹³ For a more detailed discussion on risk see Hernandez-Carretero (2009)

collective factors that, by virtue of shaping, or constraining, an individual's range of options and perspectives on the world, effect how he or she will conceptualise uncertainty and severity with respect to migration-related risk and risk taking' (Hernández-Carretero 2009, p.4). Trusting a stranger as part of an attempt to migrate through football may be considered a risk, however the consequences of this risk can be positive or negative. It is therefore not risk taking in itself, but its possible outcomes that are value-laden, and which intertwines with expected outcomes. This is how the young people I encountered in Paris, but also in Accra thought about football migration. If migrating through football was indeed a risk, it was a risk worth taking in light of their socioeconomic situation, and the feasibility of alternative options available for them to migrate and attain social mobility. This was a key factor as to how one person (football agent) was able to exercise and abuse power over another person (player), which as noted by Anderson (2007) is key to the mobilisation of potential irregular migrants. A point articulated by Gerard as follows.

In Guinea there are so many people who want to leave and think playing football is a way out, but someone needs to come and see you and take you out of that situation. It is like you have all of these prisoners and no lawyer, but if a lawyer comes everyone wants the lawyer because it is the only way out. In prison the people who have money can hire a lawyer and the next day they are out, but the people who are innocent and thrown into prison but don't have money just sit there and hope someone will come and talk to them to help them get out¹⁹⁴

Football trafficking awareness campaigns and the other strategies designed to prevent this form of irregular migration, associate success with the attainment of a secure football contract and allowing minors in particular to do so safely. But in reality, making it 'outside' and particularly to Europe is the real success. I am not justifying the practices of the intermediaries who prosper from football trafficking. However, as touched upon in the previous quote by Gerard, and also by Robert in the quote below, the result of the acts perpetrated by these intermediaries often corresponds with the underlying desire of the young people they exploit, and this is a key factor in the current effectiveness of football trafficking. If attempting to migrate through football is indeed a risk, it is one African youth deem worth taking.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Gerard (Guinean) 12/07/2011- Paris

I have two of my friends who are still in Germany and have succeeded after all the struggle. They have the papers. My friends got married to a German lady and one had a child with a German lady also, so they have the papers and they are stable and living their life, they made it¹⁹⁵

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter addressed two fundamental questions. Firstly, would football related migrants really prefer to remain at home? Secondly, is there a relationship between knowledge concerning football related trafficking and the decision to migrate through football? I began by answering the first question. I highlighted a perception amongst young people at the three clubs in Accra, that the provision of a financial safety net in the form of state welfare to alleviate future economic insecurity is unlikely. There is also an awareness that they either currently are, or eventually will become solely responsible for ensuring their future economic wellbeing. This has contributed to a shift amongst youth from a notion of temporal societal development, towards a new faith in development as freedom. However there is an accompanying awareness that immigration borders are not particularly porous. Significantly, football is now considered a realistic means to accomplish their objective of leaving West Africa to ‘go outside’, it functions as a conduit in which the contemporary convergence of economic liberalisation, and an outward orientation within West African society more broadly is able to flourish.

The second section of the chapter used football trafficking to show how stepping away from the relatively fixed moral terrain of sex related trafficking, complicates how migrants are conceptualized and treated in a destination country. I showed that while ‘victims’ of football trafficking may meet the description of a trafficked person, this does not necessarily mean they meet the administrative criteria, thus leaving them open to repatriation. Consequently, many opt to remain illegally as undocumented migrants, because their country of origin is precisely where they do not want to be. I demonstrated that raising awareness in origin countries with regards to the possible challenges and risks associated with football migration is unlikely to deter prospective migrants from attempting to migrate through football. This approach fails to consider how the perception and assessment of potential risks is linked to the wider socioeconomic situation, and the feasibility of alternative options to attain spatial and thus social mobility. These youth are not seeking to migrate because they are football players. On the contrary, they

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Robert (Cameroonian) 10/07/2011- Paris

involve themselves in football because they want to migrate. This underlying desire to migrate for non-football related reasons is a key factor in the reduction of autonomy, allowing for the imposition of unfavourable transfer and travel conditions, and instances of football trafficking to occur.

If we consider the key approaches that have emerged to tackle football trafficking, namely; regulations restricting clubs from purchasing or signing players under the age of 18, the ethical transfer charter, developing the footballing infrastructure in origin countries and awareness campaigns. At first glance these approaches appear quite distinct, for example the first two address the issue of demand, whereas the others address supply. What connects them is the implicit assumption that had it not been for some form of football related intervention, these male West African youth would have preferred to remain in their countries of origin. Moreover, the final approach also assumes that their behaviour is based upon deficient knowledge regarding the migratory process, and that the provision of 'correct information' depicting its 'true' nature is discouraging enough to dissuade them from leaving. This links to broader practices within the immigration and social services systems in destination countries, which appear to construe repatriation as the logical solution to their situation. Drawing both on findings from previous chapters and within this one, I have shown that for a variety of reasons, these assumptions are at best inconsistent with the subjectivities of male West African youth, and at worst fundamentally flawed. In the following chapter I provide a conclusion to the thesis, and offer an explanation for the disjuncture between the practices of policy makers and the dispositions of the young people they wish to help.

8.0 Conclusion



Fig 25: On the sidelines (a late comer to training)

8.1. Thesis Overview

This thesis provided an alternative theorisation and counter narrative to the structural historical theories and receiving country bias that dominate accounts of African football migration. In doing so, I showed how understanding migration through the lens of football, provides important insights into the wider conception of mobile African male bodies in migration and trafficking discourse. I argued that young West African males have lost faith in notions of temporal social development, and in its place now see development as freedom through spatial mobility. This differs from the accounts of theorists influenced by dependency and world systems literature, who portray the African football migration process as the neocolonial sourcing, refinement, and export of a raw material (African football players), for the consumption and generation of wealth in the European core, while simultaneously impoverishing the African periphery. This is said to result in the muscle drain of African football talent.

I argued that while these theories are able to illustrate the basic direction and logic underpinning the migration of African football players, particularly to Europe, their sedentary, structural and receiving country biases fail to engage with the subjectivity and agency of the players themselves. I proposed conceptualising young West African football migrants as 'entrepreneurs of self' rather than as commodities or raw materials. I did so to forefront the human dimension missing from political economy framings, and to place central interpretive weight on their subjectivities and embodied racial and gendered identities. By engaging with migrant subjectivity, cultural meanings of mobility and the social context beyond the economic, I showed that contrary to structural historical theories and anti-trafficking policy, these young people are not migrating just because of neo-colonial relations in the footballing political economy, nor because they are duped by unscrupulous traffickers. They are seeking to migrate because they want to be mobile, and football is now considered a means to achieve this.

My alternative perspective draws on ideas from four non-football related literatures that have a particular salience when applied to the migration of African football players. In Chapter 2 I introduced these four relevant but currently unexplored literatures, namely: the meaning of commodities; migrant subjectivity and agency; young people in the global south; and the racial and gendered signification of sport. The theoretical insights derived from these literatures allowed me to critique the dominant approaches currently used to explain the migration of African football players

as mentioned above, and create an alternative framework to understand this migratory process. In particular the thesis built on Poli's GCC analysis to conceptualise the migration of African football players. Poli's approach acknowledged the need to understand the economic and non-economic dynamics underpinning African football migration, while also recognizing the human element of this commodity or raw material. However, Poli's framework was unable to incorporate non-economic factors, or prevent the migration process appearing as a mechanic linear process. To address this limitation I utilized research seeking to theorise the meaning of commodities.

Two key insights emerged from my engagement with theoretical attempts to understand the meaning of commodities. Firstly, these debates confirmed the importance of acknowledging the interrelated nature of economic trade, politics and cultural meanings, and the wider social contexts from which the movement of commodities (which a football player resembles) derive. Secondly, critiques of attempts to 'unveil the commodity fetish' were found to provide an explanatory tool for understanding how and why it is possible for structural historical theories and anti-trafficking campaigns to discount the wider social context, and migrant agency and subjectivity. Problematically, however, the commodities literature is primarily concerned with non-human objects, thus like the historical structural theories that I seek to elaborate upon, it was unable to address a key peculiarity of a footballer in relation to other commodities, the human dimension. I proposed that the three other non-football related literatures mentioned above offered a means to add a human dimension to the migration of African football players, and therefore find a more appropriate way to conceptualise these migrants than as a commodity or raw material.

I argued that regular and irregular forms of African football migration involve children and youth. Yet problematically, the rapidly growing literature on young people in the Global South is absent from discussions on African football migration. Consequently the insights that emerge from thinking through the experience of children and youth more generally have yet to be applied to this particular topic. I highlighted the merits of integrating work in the social sciences concerning the agency and subjectivity of young people in the Global South, with contemporary literature that attempts to retheorise migrant agency. The latter seeks to change the perception of migrants as objects or victims of migration regimes by highlighting their subjectivities (Anderson et al. 2009). As a result of engaging with these literatures, the empirical chapters in the thesis set out to stress the importance of circumstances prior to movement, and situated the desire to migrate within a

particular, local and specific context that treats the political, economic and cultural spheres as fundamentally interwoven.

My argument then emphasized how in sport subjectivities are expressed and interpreted in ways that are both racialized and gendered (Messner 1989). Sporting contests are attributed racial and gendered significance, which influences and is influenced by understandings of sporting ability as being attributable to racial and gendered characteristics (Carrington 2002; St Louis 2004). I argued that this is important for understanding the migration of African football players, as the belief that black West African males are genetically predisposed to excel in football now circulates within the football industry (Alegi 2010; Back et al. 2001; Entine 2001; Parker 2001). Problematically, in academia, the racial and gendered signification of sport is often framed within the paradigm of social constructionism. This paradigm disrupts notions of race and genders biological essence, but also evades the issue of materiality and how race and gender become embodied through sporting practices. To overcome this problem, I proposed that we conceptualise race and gender as spatially embodied practices, and consider both their discursive and material components (see Connell 2005; Saldanha 2006; Slocum 2008).

In bringing together these four non-football related literatures I was able to make an original contribution to the understanding of African football migration by creating an alternative framework to theorise African football migration, and generate important theoretical reflections. These reflections can in turn be summarized by two key questions that I sought to answer throughout the thesis. Firstly, what happens if we move beyond social historical theories and incorporate the subjectivities of African males? Secondly, how is it possible for analysts to have so systematically ignored migrant subjectivity, the cultural meanings of football and mobility, as well as the social context beyond the economic?

In Chapter 3 I provided an account of the research methods and strategies used in this study, and I justified my decision to use a qualitative methodology in the form of a 'critical ethnography of migration'. This approach allowed the study to address limitations in the structural historical theories currently used to understand African football migration in two key ways. Firstly, it brought the subjectivity of multiple actors that are hidden in structural historical theories to the foreground. Secondly, it enabled the researcher to be embedded in a local context that is experienced holistically (that is to say without pre-defining distinct economic, political and cultural spheres). This provided the thesis with a data collection strategy capable of

investigating the temporal and spatially specific meanings tied to notions of identity and subjectivity, migrant agency, and the wider social context from which African football migration emanates. It also allowed me to investigate what people do, as well as what they say, thus enabling me to study the discursive and embodied aspects of race and gender as mentioned above. I also provided an account of the data collection process during fieldwork in Accra (Ghana) and Paris (France).

I was able to select suitable field sites to conduct multi-sited ethnography in Accra by using Poli's (2005) GCC framework. The framework identifies the key traits and characteristics of the clubs associated with African football migration, which in turn allowed me to identify three appropriate Ghanaian football clubs to undertake my data collection. In addition to undertaking ethnography at the clubs, which enabled me to incorporate the subjectivity of the players themselves within the study, I also elaborated on Poli's framework by conducting 'expert' interviews with executive members of the GFA, key individuals involved in the governance of Ghanaian football, educational practitioners and staff at an internationally recognized academy (RtD).

No study is without its limitations, and it is in Chapter 3 that I highlighted the challenges I encountered attempting to gain access to a 'hidden population', as part of my attempt to gather detailed accounts of the migration process from the perspective of migrants with first hand experience of football trafficking. For example, I would have liked to have conducted interviews with Ghanaian migrants in Paris, however gaining access to a 'hidden population' was fraught with challenges, and in this context it is not always possible for a researcher to control the exact make up of participants. The primary objective in Paris was to gain narratives from West African migrants with first hand experience of football trafficking, and I was able to do so. Furthermore, if funding had permitted I would have spent more time undertaking fieldwork to obtain data from other West African countries, such as Cameroon or Côte d'Ivoire. Even though there were strong parallels between the narratives obtained from migrants in Paris and my findings in Accra, conducting research in a French speaking West African country may have provided me with added contextual insight.

In Chapter 4, which was the first of four empirical discussion chapters, I contextualised current migration dynamics within Ghanaian football through an excavation of the historical developments in the Ghanaian football industry. I argued that while changes in world football and its European hub do influence the economic organisation of Ghana's footballing political

economy, a reliance on this deterministic explanatory crux leaves much unexplained. In order to better comprehend changes in both irregular and regular forms of football migration, it is also imperative to appreciate how changes in world football are understood, transformed and rejected within Ghana itself, as part of broader social changes occurring within the country. The 1991 FIFA youth championships were a watershed moment in terms of both regular and irregular Ghanaian football migration. The tournament highlighted the potential of football as a means for attaining spatial mobility amongst Ghanaians, and coincided with an era in which the model for economic development was enacted through neoliberalism in the form of SAPs.

In line with these societal shifts towards neoliberalism, the Ghanaian Amateur Football Association (GAFA) became the Ghanaian Football Association (GFA) and attempted to professionalize the sport, with football becoming more widely associated with commercial practices. At the same time there was a significant increase in the formation of clubs at amateur and youth level, and an even more notable increase in the number of young people playing football. There is also an acknowledgment amongst officials, club owners and the players themselves that many of those involved in football from the under-14 age category upwards, no longer play just for fun or the 'love of the game'. This is allied to the growing perception that football is a business, and those involved at all levels should be remunerated. In Ghana this is expressed empirically in the case of academy players at amateur level clubs demanding that their club owners 'give them transport', a phrase that relates to covering travel costs but also payment for playing. Ghanaian football is in an era of 'financialization', with speculation centered on youth players and their registration cards. Importantly, I showed how it is beneficial to speculators to increase the volume of player movement domestically and internationally, and how in some cases movement has become a necessary aspect of club football in contemporary Ghana.

In Chapter 5 I answered the research question, 'why are male West African youth more disposed to prioritizing a career in professional football?' or as they say in Ghana, 'why does everybody want to play by force?' The answer to this question may appear obvious, i.e. fame and financial remuneration. However, the goal of this chapter was to provide a richer understanding of a complex array of motivations in specific contexts for specific individuals, and how this related to the migration process. I argued that a career in professional football now provides male Ghanaian youth with a means to circumvent an education system they consider to lead to

unemployment, or unacceptable employment in the feminized informal economy. But it also does more than that, it provides them with an opportunity to engage in behaviour associated with masculine traits, namely displays of wealth through conspicuous consumption and living how a young modern Ghanaian male should, what participants referred to as the 'X Way'.

The transition from junior to senior secondary school emerged as a pivotal moment within many of the biographical accounts I collected in Accra. I used theorisations of youth in the Global South to conceptualise this moment as a 'vital conjuncture', that is a 'socially structured zone of possibility that emerges around specific periods of potential transformation in a life or lives' (Johnson-Hanks 2002, p.871). Male youth at the three clubs claimed that it was at this moment in their lives that the spiralling cost of privatised education led them to 'drop out' of school. The recourse to a career in professional football at this 'vital conjuncture' was the outcome of their socioeconomic situation.

In the process of understanding why so many male Ghanaian youths think they can become professional football players, I make an original contribution to theorisations of commodities by answering Poli's (2005) question as to whether there is a better way to conceptualise a footballer than as a commodity, a conceptualisation that is able to accommodate the human dimension of this situation. Influenced by the theorisations of Bourdieu and Foucault, more specifically their work on bodily capital and entrepreneurship respectively. I argued that within the football industry, neoliberal capitalism's model of exchange and value extends itself to include the individual, but this does not instigate a 'commodification of self' (as for example celebrity theorists propose) rather the individual becomes an enterprise, an 'entrepreneur of self'. In the absence of state welfare, the perception that football offers a means to create an income and be self-sufficient is very appealing. For these male youth, the West African professional football player who is able to draw upon his natural sporting bodily capital to obtain travel documents, spatial mobility and live the 'X-Way' embodies success.

I am a Ghanaian by birth and parentage, but having lived in Britain for the majority of my life I initially found this perspective perplexing. It reflected the fact that young Ghanaian would-be footballers had a very different understanding of the balance between merit and risk than I did. Although a talented player myself, as a teenager I perceived the relative likelihood of success in football to be much lower than in alternative professions. It was my understanding that only exceptionally talented players went on to be successful. I therefore never considered pursuing a career in professional

football, as investing in my footballing ability was deemed too risky. It would have prevented me from pursuing alternative, and in my opinion, more realistic career paths. Yet for the Ghanaian and West African males I encountered in Accra and Paris respectively, the balance between merit and risk is different. There is far less to lose and more to gain by taking a gamble on the claim that you are good enough to become a professional football player. Moreover, as I show in Chapter 6, this is linked to a belief that success in football is not dependent on talent alone.

In Chapter 6, I focused on the research question ‘how does irregular migration emerge from the West African footballing milieu?’ Following on from findings in Chapter 4, I argued that in contrast to the early post-independence era- a period where the state was more involved in the sports development and infrastructure- footballers are now keen to leave and ply their trade abroad. This is despite the promotion of professionalism within Ghanaian football in the last two decades, an approach designed to counter this migratory trend. I showed that Ghanaian footballers are indeed keen to leave and ply their trade abroad, however this is only partially attributable to the culture of mediocrity pervading Ghanaian, and West African football more generally. The more pressing issue is that obtaining a transfer and migrating is very difficult. This is due to increased competition from other aspirant professionals, and also because it is increasingly difficult to differentiate legitimate chances to obtain an international transfer, from the deceitful acts of opportunistic fraudsters.

I provide fresh perspectives on youthful subjectivities in the Global South, by showing how the solution to the uncertainty surrounding football migration is to, as they say in Ghana, ‘try your luck’, a form of social navigation dependent upon simultaneously using a distinguishable talent or skill (in this case football) and the spiritual realm, which alongside money forms the key to success. I show that the key dimensions for interpreting the relationship between subjectivity and motivation reflected in young people’s willingness to ‘try their luck’ are spirituality and scientific training. This combination produces a tension between striving for proprietorship of one’s self, and the notion that a person is to a large extent operated through spiritual powers (see also Meyer 1998). Young footballers often overcome this contradiction by engaging with both the spiritual realm and with scientific training methods, the latter being shaped by notions of race and gender as spatially embodied practices. Unfortunately, a social predisposition towards ‘trying your luck’ favours the existence of opportunistic fraudsters, and

encourages the prevalence of exploitative and potentially unfavourable travel conditions in the form of irregular migration.

The subject of irregular migration was brought to the fore in Chapter 7. I used findings from Accra and Paris to investigate if a relationship exists between knowledge concerning football-related trafficking, and the decision to migrate through football. I argued that the young people I encountered have lost faith in notions of temporal social development, and in its place now see development as freedom through spatial mobility. However, this is coupled with a perception that this desired mobility is difficult to attain. Significantly, football is now considered a realistic means to accomplish the objective of attaining spatial mobility. I argued that contrary to structural historical theories, these young people are not seeking to migrate because they are football players, instead they are seeking to migrate because they want to be mobile and football is the way to achieve this. The disappearance of several male members of various African teams, including Cameroon, for 'economic reasons' during the London 2012 Olympic games, corroborates my argument that sport is now considered a means to gain passage abroad. This finding has significant policy implications. Young African males often involve themselves in football because they want to migrate, thus FIFA regulations and anti-trafficking campaigns which seek to curtail instances of migration by regulating clubs and increasing knowledge on the subject of football trafficking are likely to prove inadequate.

In terms of the politics of African football migration in both its regular and irregular form, I appear to leave this study in the same place as those who see certain migrants as deceptive, as they may for example pretend to be asylum seekers when they are really economic migrants¹⁹⁶. It could be argued that migrants in this study, and even the members of the Olympic team are engaging in a similar form of deceit, as they present themselves as migrating for sporting reasons when in truth they are migrating to achieve 'freedom' or 'development'. However, as shown above, these two positions are not mutually exclusive. The idea that football is considered a means to obtain spatial and thus social mobility now circulates openly in West Africa. It only appears deceptive because analysts have systematically failed to acknowledge migrant subjectivity, cultural meanings of football and mobility, and the social context beyond the economic.

If analysts and those concerned with African football migration view this migratory process from Africa, and incorporate the subjectivities of young

¹⁹⁶ See Griffiths (2012) for a discussion on the role of credibility in asylum applications

African males, they will see that there is more to the young people who become embroiled in both irregular and regular forms of African football migration than their status as passive victims of neocolonial relations or trafficking regimes. Investigating African football migration from Africa itself enabled me to analyse the complex dynamics of this migration process not in isolation, but as part of complex and varied processes of societal change. This allowed me to show that the exploitative practices taking place during the act of migration are pieces of a larger puzzle.

The stories around and beyond the football political economy and the act of migration should not, and cannot be ignored. The young people involved in this migratory process have agency, and they are able to make the background to their migration at least partially knowable (in a practical sense), as evidenced in this thesis. However, in my experiences during and after undertaking this research, I found that references to narratives beyond football and the act of migration are conspicuous by their absence¹⁹⁷. A good example of this is the reaction I received from CFS when I interviewed participants with first hand experience of football trafficking. The organization was surprised that I took an interest in the biography of participants prior to their migration, and beyond the football industry. By avoiding broader understandings of the young people involved in both regular and irregular forms of African football migration, the conclusions of analysts and those concerned with African football migration are inadvertently reductive. Consequently, the dominant accounts of African football migration, particularly football trafficking, prevent the agency of these migrants and or their history from interfering with their understanding of this topic and their subsequent policies. So how is it possible for analysts to have so systematically ignored migrant subjectivity, cultural meanings of football and mobility and the social context beyond the economic?

8.2 The ‘African football migration fetish’

I propose that the reason analysts have systematically ignored migrant subjectivity, cultural meanings of football and mobility, and the social context beyond the economic, is linked to the internal logic of responses to football trafficking. The structural logic of responses to football trafficking is similar to the academic treatment of Marx’s commodity fetish, ‘the intellectual project of making visible the hidden injustices of commodity production by locating

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Jean Claude Mbvoumin 06/07/2011- CFS Paris, Presentation by Jean-Claude Mbvoumin 06/03/2012- Birkbeck College, University of London, Sport for development conference Vienna, visualizing the game Basel

the appropriation of labour'. I came to this conclusion by way of Ben Page's (2005) research on the commodification of water in Cameroon, namely the relationship between consumer knowledge regarding the provision of water and their willingness to pay for it. The engineers and politicians charged with managing water supplies in Cameroon, argued that the disinclination amongst consumers to pay for their water was due to ignorance regarding the costs associated with building and maintaining the necessary infrastructure. Accordingly, for the past thirty years they have attempted to educate consumers about the hidden costs of their water supply, in the belief that doing so will change their attitudes and behaviour. It has not. Page (2005) observed a fundamental flaw in this approach, concerning the way in which the relationship between knowledge and willingness to pay for water was conceptualized.

The engineers and politicians assumed that persuading Cameroonian consumers to pay for water was simply a case of revealing the hidden costs of its production, ignoring how the belief that water should be free was temporally cultivated and that there had been periods where consumers were willing to pay for water. Page found that this project of educating consumers on the cost of water was similar to the academic exercise of 'unveiling the commodity fetish'. As discussed in the literature review, the commodity fetish seeks to make known that which the commodity hides, however like the project of educating water consumers on production costs, it sees the process of uncovering the content of the commodity as the final goal of analysis. Importantly, as highlighted below by Page (2005, p.299) it fails to go on to understand that there is something particular about the category of objects known as commodities.

The question is not only 'who what and where are crystallized in commodity bodies?' (Castree 2001, p.1522), but also why it is that work can 'affirm its social character only in the commodity form of its product?' (Zizek 1989 p. 11)

Standard analysis of the commodity fetish aims to lay bare the process of production, but this is only the first step. Influenced by Zizek and a psychoanalytical perspective, Page (2005) discusses how Marx was not merely aiming to unveil the hidden content of the commodity. The secret of the commodity that he sought to understand was not labour time itself, but the way in which labour time is subconsciously drawn into the mystery of commodity exchange through abstraction, the mechanism that disguises labour time by giving it the form of a commodity. The abstraction that takes

place during commodity exchange binds subjects together by knowingly misrecognising the wider social network that underpins market exchange. The ruse of the commodity fetish therefore resides in its ability to deceive the critic into believing that by unveiling the mystery of the commodity's content, an appropriate political programme can be identified and implemented e.g. fair trade or ethical trade.

In comparison to earlier readings of consumer ideology and the commodity fetish, which rested upon the assumption that subaltern subjects were unaware as to the consequences of their actions, contemporary readings suggest that in this information age, subjects are often made aware of these consequences, yet it does not necessarily alter their behaviour. So what does this tell us about football trafficking and African football migration more generally? Similarly to the engineers and politicians charged with managing water supplies in Cameroon, FIFA, CFS and other stakeholders believe that unmasking the hidden content of African football migration and football trafficking e.g. fraudulent football agents, the recruitment of minors by European clubs, and inadequacies in the footballing infrastructure of origin countries is the final step. Consequently, the exploitative practices encountered by young West African males become associated with movement and football. If they had remained at home they would have been safe. This position is in direct conflict with migrant subjectivities. So how do trafficked and regular football migrants become better off at home?

The cause of this disjuncture between migrant subjectivities and those of analysts and policy makers is because there is a temptation to stop once the hidden content of African football migration is unveiled. The repercussion of doing so is a collective failure to recognize that there is something particular about the category of subject known as an African football migrant. This is even more pertinent for those who become known as a victim of football trafficking (VoFT).

The question is not only who what and where are crystallized in VoFT bodies, but also why it is that work can affirm its social character only in this form (adapted from Page 2005, p.299)

Similarly to the academic exercise of unveiling the commodity fetish, abstraction also takes place when conceptualizing football trafficking, but in this scenario it binds subjects together by knowingly misrecognising the wider socio-historical context that underpins their migration. Migrant agency and the wider narrative is drawn into and hidden within the VoFT form. It is this process of abstraction that allows the VoFT to function as a means to

disassociate categories that need not be separated, such as the trafficked person and the notion of agency. This is also perhaps how the dominant discourse on child trafficking as discussed in Chapter 7, is able to circumvent a potential contradiction in the victim-agency binary associated with the conundrum posed by a child migrant. The value of categorizing a person as a VoFT, or attributing them irregular migrant status more generally is because although it should not, this status can be used by a state to deny a person the right to remain in a destination country. This situation is evident in the case of football trafficking, where the majority of players now enter destination countries in a regular manner, but having been 'duped' by a football agent or unsuccessful at their trial and subsequently abandoned, often remain illegally once their tourist visa has expired.

Unveiling the 'African football migration fetish' results in the conclusion that as a VoFT, they arrived under fraudulent and exploitative circumstances caused by football related migration. They came under a false premise and would not have migrated had they foreseen this outcome, so the logical solution is to return them to their country of origin. Accordingly, regardless of whether or not they wish to remain, there is no reason for them to do so. Yet as I have shown in this thesis, their country of origin is precisely where they do not want to be. This is perhaps problematic for some analysts and policy makers, as it implicates the migrant in the process, and thus disturbs the victim-criminal binary that underpins dominant trafficking discourses. Once again, this only appears to be the case if we fail to engage with migrant subjectivity, cultural meanings of football and mobility and the social context beyond the economic. As highlighted in Chapters 6 and 7, it is increasingly difficult to differentiate legitimate chances to migrate through football from the deceitful acts of opportunistic fraudsters. A social predisposition towards 'trying your luck' favours the existence of opportunistic fraudsters, and encourages the prevalence of exploitative and potentially unfavourable travel conditions in the form of football trafficking. The appearance of complicity is because the eventual outcome of migration and gaining entry to foreign climes accords with their underlying desire to attain spatial and thus social mobility.

Unveiling the 'African football migration fetish' allows commentators to ignore the possibility that these youth are seeking to migrate for non-football related reasons. This provides a means to overlook how the process of migration does not necessarily begin either with the actions of duplicitous agents at trials known in Ghana as a 'Justify your inclusion', or with the demand for African talent amongst foreign clubs, or even the 'culture of

mediocrity'. It often begins with a 'body and a dream at a vital juncture', which is the manifestation of a broader struggle for survival and a sense of a less than certain future. The idea that young African subjects must take responsibility for their own future life chances is, in the context of Ghana, relatively new. It has largely replaced the idea that individuals exist within extended communities, and in the post-independence era of President Kwame Nkrumah's social developmentalism, the idea that the state would assist in welfare provision. This change has produced a different form of subjectivity, one in which an individual is obliged to take greater responsibility for their future. As shown in Chapters 4 and 5, this new idea of individual responsibility has a history, and it is a story that can be closely associated with the suite of ideas usually bracketed together under the banner of neoliberalism.

The sense of individuation, competition and the treatment of the body as capital embodied in the 'entrepreneur of self', are all linked to this idea of youthful West Africans taking responsibility for their own future life chances. If young Ghanaian men desire to move across the world to play football, it is because they are now obliged to compete alongside a world of individuals to better themselves. This creates a contradiction. On the one hand there is a belief that to 'develop' Ghana it is necessary to transform its citizens into atomized, individuated capitalist subjects, in order to benefit from competitive advantage (e.g. cheap labour) in a more integrated world market. While on the other hand, there is a belief that despite successfully instilling such a form of subjectivity, young men in Ghana will be willing to remain sedentary rather than mobile. In other words, if the idea that individuals must take responsibility for their own future has been successfully internalized, then it is perverse to assume that these same individuals should not seek to migrate to better their lives.

The use of structural historical theories and accounts of a neocolonial 'muscle drain' skillfully diverts our attention away from the possibility that these young people are not seeking to migrate just because they are football players, that in fact they are seeking to migrate in attempt to improve their material situation. The 'African football migration fetish' evades the possibility that perhaps, as I found in Ghana, that these young people involve themselves in football because they want to migrate and escape their stagnant position within a growing economy. Ghana's recent economic success is of little relevance to these individuals, because their own resources, qualifications and capacities cannot help them to enjoy the material benefits of such growth. This is even more frustrating because life becomes 'an

economy of goods that are known, that may sometimes be seen, that one wants to enjoy, but to which one will never have material access' (Mbembe cited in Ferguson 2006, p.192). It could therefore be argued that the 'problem' is actually migrant subjectivity and agency, and the wider socio-historical context from which migrants originate. Such a reading skillfully ignores a fundamental point. The problem is not the agency and subjectivity of African football migrants, nor is it the wider social contexts from which they originate. The problem is that by failing to acknowledge migrant subjectivities and the wider context in which migration originates, we lose sight of the increasingly spatial nature of approaches to overcome the uncertainty and constraints on life ambitions facing young people residing in Africa.

The real ruse of the 'African football migration fetish' therefore resides not only in its ability to deceive stakeholders into believing that by exposing this migratory process, an appropriate political programme can be identified and implemented e.g. regulations, ethical charter and education campaigns. The ruse is also its ability to conceal how in an era of globalization characterized by ever-expanding connection and communication, there is also an ever-expanding prominence of walls, borders and high technologies of social exclusion (Anderson et al. 2009; Chuang 2006; Ferguson 2006; Sharma 2005). Conversely, this situation exists against a backdrop in which globalization has not brought modernity in the form of 'first world' living standards to young people residing in Africa (see also Ferguson 2006). It has merely brought an awareness of them. By ignoring migrant subjectivity and viewing migration as being distinct from broader social relationships, we maintain the perception that migration and development are antagonistic. The irony is that the loss of faith in interventionist development amongst male West African youth corresponds with contemporary neoliberal governance, which is also no longer (if indeed it ever was) concerned with temporal notions of socioeconomic convergence through improved developmental strategies. The key concerns are now securing resources (especially raw materials and energy), consumer markets, and policing the edges of status groups (Ferguson 2006).

In conclusion, this thesis has argued that understanding migration through the lens of football provides significant insights into the broader conception of mobile African male bodies in migration and trafficking discourse. I used this group of migrants to further debates in migration studies by showing what is at stake in ignoring migrant subjectivity, cultural meanings of mobility and the social context beyond the economic. Analysts who do so hide the fact that many people do not feel that they are 'better off at

home'. This creates a tension, as policy makers advocating that young African men should seek their future in situ are diametrically opposed to the migratory disposition of the young African males I encountered, who associate spatial mobility with social mobility. Addressing this tension potentially holds the key to resolving football trafficking. While resolving this contradiction is beyond the scope of this thesis, I nonetheless hope that this thesis has demonstrated the need for a policy that resorts neither to a sedentary bias nor to a view of migration as an aberrant form of behaviour in need of fixing (Anderson et al. 2009).

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Appendix 1:

Godwin's email from the fake agent

From: [REDACTED]
Date: 14 April 2011 14:55:41 GMT+01:00
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Fw: Remainder [REDACTED]

--- On Mon, 4/11/11, Koshimae <[REDACTED]> wrote:

From: Koshimae [REDACTED]
Subject: Remainder [REDACTED]
To: [REDACTED]
Date: Monday, April 11, 2011, 7:15 AM

To:

How are you today. What is going with your completion for your Alien Certification license with the Ministry?

If you are not interested anymore, you should give us notice for cancellations immediately so that we can contract other interested players who are willing to go through their registration and licensing but if you still have a full interest in this offer, kindly proceed in completing the process the ministry of Labour and Social Security today to enable your paperwork to be certified.

We await your response in this regard.

Thank you

Mr. Koshi mae