

THE BALL IS FLAT

THE BALL IS FLAT:  
A STUDY OF INSTITUTIONAL RACISM IN FOOTBALL

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## Abstract:

This project examines the ways in which the global mobility of players has unsettled the traditional nationalistic structure of football and the anxious responses by specific football institutions as they struggle to protect their respective political and economic hegemonies over the game. My intention is to expose the recent institutional exploitation of football's "cultural power" (Stoddart, *Cultural Imperialism* 650) and ability to impassion and mobilize the masses in order to maintain traditional concepts of authority and identity. The first chapter of this project will interrogate the exclusionary selection practices of both the Mexican and the English Football Associations. Both institutions promote ethnoracially singular understandings of national identity as a means of escaping disparaging accusations of "artificiality," thereby protecting the purity and prestige of the nation, as well as the profitability of the national brand. The next chapter will then turn its attention to FIFA's proposed 6+5 policy, arguing that the rule is an institutional effort by FIFA to constrain and control the traditional structure of football in order to preserve the profitability of its highly "mediated and commodified spectacle" (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 231) as well as assert its authority and autonomy in the global realm. The third chapter will assess the English Premier League's home-grown policy – an apparent legislative imitation of the FIFA 6+5 initiative. I will argue that the home-grown policy is a strategic measure intent on reproducing a "white, male English" identity (King 170) as a means of strengthening the "English" presence within both the league and the national squad.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE.....	i
DESCRIPTIVE NOTE.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: NATIONAL SQUAD SELECTION PRACTICES OF MEXICO AND ENGLAND.....	15
CHAPTER 2: FIFA'S 6+5 POLICY.....	50
CHAPTER 3: THE ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE'S HOME-GROWN POLICY.....	84
CONCLUSION.....	108
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	112

## INTRODUCTION

I spend far too much time watching football;<sup>1</sup> certainly more than what many would consider healthy or reasonable. In fact, this summer's World Cup genuinely jeopardized the timely completion of this project. But I cannot help myself. The game fascinates me: the fluidity, the creativity, the tension, the anticipation, the rivalry. Incredible! What has always struck me, and stuck with me, though, while watching the game is the way players are always identified according to the nation they represent: *What a strike from the Dutch international; a yellow card for the foul on the English international; the blistering pace of the Brazilian international*. Such referencing seems to suggest that the most important aspect of these players is their nationality: their name, their ability or their sporting accomplishments seem to be secondary to their nationality. In football, though, nationality proves a curious, if not problematic, proposition – for nationality does not necessarily involve one's nation of birth, or even one's adopted nation. English international Owen Hargreaves, for example, was born in Canada, played his club football in Germany, and did not arrive in England until seven years after making his England team debut. And in the world of football, Hargreaves' "nationality" situation is hardly unique. Neither is this sort of complex consideration of nationality a new phenomenon; it is an aspect of

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<sup>1</sup> This project will employ the term "football," as opposed to "soccer" throughout.

global society that tracks back to the times of colonialism. Yet despite the historical prominence of such multiple-citizenships and mixed identities, only over the past twenty years or so have they become a strong, even dominant, presence in the realm of football.

What this emerging trend essentially highlights is the ways in which the global movement of players is re-shaping the state of football. To say that this change has been met favorably, however, would be untrue. In recent years, the ethnoracially diverse state of football has been harshly criticized and heavily blamed for sporting inequalities in both domestic and international competition. In response, football's dominant institutions have begun to push for policies and practices that promise to bring equality to the game through a reinvestment in traditional, hypernationalistic concepts of space and identity. Essentially, these institutions are seeking to regulate the global mobility of players and maintain the ethnoracial singularity of the respective leagues and squads through racially-constrictive rules of participation. This institutional desire to compartmentalize race struck me almost immediately as problematic. How would isolating and containing nations and nationalities bring equality to the game? In a globalized world of cultural mobility and blurred boundaries, could nations and nationalities even be isolated and contained? And if so, can it be achieved equitably? It seemed



to me that in a game already marred by racism,<sup>2</sup> such attempts would only amplify ethnoracial tensions, while doing very little to rectify inequalities in the game. So I decided to investigate these policies, practices and institutions in order to understand what effects they have had, and will have on both the game and the people that involve themselves in the game (the players, the fans, the spectators). Through this investigation I came to realize that equality is a concept that has never truly existed in football... and institutional control over and manipulation of the game was consistently the reason why.

***Whoever invented football should be worshipped as a God.***

***~ Hugo Sanchez***

To this day the exact origins of football remain debatable – for, as David Goldblatt points out in his incomparably comprehensive history of global football, *The Ball is Round*, “competitive ball games are present in nearly all the cultures of the ancient world” (9). Nevertheless, it was England who first developed and gave structure to the game of football as it is known around the globe today. Yet, while England today might be heralded as the inventor of the world’s most popular sport, the journey from conception to global adoration proves fraught with

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<sup>2</sup> See for example: Franklin Foer’s *How Soccer Explains the World*; Christos Kassimeris’ *European football in black and white*; Colin King’s “Play the White man;” and Sam King’s “Racial violence mars World Cup progress.”

institutional manipulation, exploitation and deprecation: all of which problematizes the adulation and deification recommended by Hugo Sanchez in this section's heading.

Although popular among the lower-class, football during the Georgian period was largely considered a “useless and barbarous” sport by English institutions (Goldblatt 23): it was categorized alongside other “brutish” sporting activities such as cockfighting and bear-baiting. Spurred on by the game's supposed impact on labor discipline, as well as changes in power and ideology brought about by the 1832 Reform Act, which sought to eradicate the “social disorder [and] unregulated violence” inherent in traditional sports such as football (23), English institutions – political, business and religious alike – endeavored to suppress the game, and thus its players, rendering the sport nearly extinct.

The game, however, took on new meaning as a result of these reforms, which ultimately led to the revitalization of the sport in England as well as the propagation of the game globally. Scholars such as J.A. Mangan, Ronald Hyam, Brian Stoddart and David Goldblatt, among others, argue that the Victorians were firm believers in the correlation between physical, mental and moral health (Mangan 2; Hyam 141; Stoddart 651; Goldblatt 27). As football proved universally appealing, especially to schoolboys, academic institutions tactfully appropriated the game as an academic tool, a means of developing human capital. Through the establishment of strict rules and regulations, educators successfully

tamed the violent aspects of the game, creating instead an effective platform for shaping the character of young men:

Through sport boys acquire virtues which no books can give them; not merely daring and endurance, but better still, temper, self-restraint, fairness, honour, unenvious appropriation of another's success and all that 'give and take' of life which stand a man in good stead when he goes forth into the world and without which, indeed, his success is always maimed and partial. (Charles Kingsley, qtd. in Goldblatt 27-8)

Under Victorian reform, the perception and the purpose of football was transformed. The institutionalization of the game turned it into a means of refining youth. It was no longer a riotous display, but rather a practical and effective means of ingraining ideologies, instilling rational sensibilities and a sense of discipline, as well as developing physical fitness – all traits which were considered crucial to the tasks of an imperial gentleman. In a similar vein, football provided an ideal forum for displays of homosociality. Michael Kimmel suggests that males need such venues to assert their masculinity, to prove they are strong, capable and immune to fear before their fellow brothers (104): again, traits invaluable to the imperial gentleman-in-training.

Football became an invaluable tool for indoctrinating imperial values in young Englishmen and, equally vital to the global dissemination of English imperial ideology. Brian Stoddart argues that the perseverance of Britain's

imperial domination was not achieved through “naked bureaucratic or military coercion,” but rather through “cultural power – the set of ideas, beliefs, rules, and conventions concerning social behavior that was carried throughout the empire by such British servants as administrators, military officers, industrialists, agriculturalists, traders, financiers, settlers, educators, and advisors of various kinds” (*Cultural Imperialism* 650). When it first arrived in Latin America, football was perceived as a bizarre ritual: a group of “crazy Englishmen... playing their crazy game with a stitched leather ball” (Goldblatt 125-6). Yet, despite this initially incomprehensible sight, the game proved both captivating and appealing to foreign populations. Football’s “continuous flow, its unpredictability, its combination of teamwork and individual bravado, its respect for both mental and physical labor” (118), all contributed to its mass appeal. The game was also less costly and easier to organize than other sports, making it accessible to all, regardless of one’s position in the social order.

But this sense of accessibility was ultimately illusive. Despite operating under the guise of “egalitarian and apolitical agency” (Stoddart, *Cultural Imperialism* 651), football was rigidly controlled by English authorities. The English Football Association developed not only rules for playing the game, but also rules for inclusion in the game. Perhaps the most significant of these rules was the need to speak the English language. As Whal notes, “all players [were required to] use the English language exclusively when playing together” (qtd. in

Goldblatt 116). This strict regulation offers an ideal illustration of England's "cultural power" enacted through football. The fervent and wide-spread desire to participate in football fuelled the spread of the English language throughout the colonies, effectively aiding the suppression of foreign cultures and the assimilation of Others into English imperial ideologies.<sup>3</sup>

The English language requirement also functioned as a means of exclusion, barring those from the lower classes from participating in the game – for, as J. Walton remarks, "Football is [sic] a modern and open-minded tendency directed at upper- and middle-class people with 'advanced' cultivated ideas" (qtd. in Goldblatt 116). Football was not a game simply or generously taught to new populations, it was tactfully utilized to manipulate and acculturate those in powerful socio-political positions capable of influencing the social order in line with English imperial will. In fact, as David Goldblatt argues, football was initially intended to "keep the British apart from their colonial subjects, to demonstrate their difference and to maintain their ties to home" (106). It wasn't until the instability of colonial politics became apparent, as evidenced by incidents such as the Indian uprising of 1857, that the British realized the need to enlist the support of the respective local ruling elite (106). By selectively opening up access to prestigious sports, like football, English imperialists were able to buy

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance, Galeano, Mangan, Stoddart (*Cultural Imperialism*), Sugden and Tomlinson (*Contest*), and Goldblatt.

favor from the respective ruling elites, authorize their hierarchical status in the colony as well as capitalize on the “cultural power” of football in order to consolidate imperial authority. Yet, by erecting barriers of exclusion, such as limiting language within the game – a proficiency that was selectively taught to specific classes (and castes in the case of India) – imperial institutions legitimized the pre-existing hierarchies and inequalities. Football thus served to both impose and perpetuate oppressive socio-political dynamics within colonial states.

Beyond propagating the English language on a global scale, football was also used to entrench a set of moral codes and conventions prescribed by English imperial institutions. No different than the sport-oriented education used to preen Victorian England’s schoolboys, football was used to tame and refine the “barbarous” ways of foreign cultures, to bring foreign peoples in line with English values and codes of behavior:

By playing team sports, participants were thought to learn teamwork, *the value of obeying constituted authority*, courage in the face of adversity, loyalty to fellow players, and *respect for the rules*. (Stoddart, *Cultural Imperialism* 653, *emphasis added*)

While these values and understandings are critical to participation on the pitch, they also prove desirable qualities for colonial participation off the pitch – for above all else, they emphasize the importance of submitting and conforming to the laws, and lawmakers of the game. And since the rules are dictated by a

centralized English institution, this involves submitting to English authority and conforming to English ideals and ideologies. However, given football's reputation for enabling "egalitarian and apolitical agency," this set of beliefs is unconsciously ingrained. In other words, while players believed they were taking part in sports activity, they were in fact taking part in their own subjugation; and as Brian Stoddart suggests, this process of subliminal subjugation – or "cultural power" – has effects "which persist beyond the end of formal empire" (651).

Football's overwhelming intrigue and appeal also saw many European nations venture to England in search of the game, constructing in the process an informal English empire. In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, Anglophilia rose among continental European nations, especially those nations in close proximity to Britain. During this period, English culture and the English language were considered the "mark of modernity" (Goldblatt 116), prompting many to travel to England "in search of social refinement and technical teaching" (120). The journey, however, also provided these travelling scholars with a new sporting enterprise in the discovery of football. Immediately taken by the sport, Danish enthusiasts established Continental Europe's first football club, Kobenhavn Boldklub, in 1876, as well as Europe's first football association in 1889. A similar urgency was noted of the Dutch, who "did not wait for the British to arrive, they went to Britain or brought the British to them" (120). These and other such endeavors to bring organized football to the continent involved importing and

incorporating English rules and structures of the game, effectively furthering the cultural assimilation of other European nations.

A noticeable legacy of England's informal empire is evident in English football terms – such as *field*, *goal*, *off-side*, *corner kick* – that remain embedded in foreign lexicons around the world. Similarly, many club names throughout Europe show lingering traces of English influence. For example, *AC* and *Inter Milan* have both embraced the English translation instead of their native vernacular, Milano; Deventer, Netherlands club *Go Ahead Eagles* further highlights the pervasive presence of English encoding in foreign footballing nations. This European diffusion of football, moreover, worked to solidify the English structure of the game – for, as Eduardo Galeano points out, to this day “few changes have been made to the British rules which first organized the sport” (27). As such, England's “cultural power,” entrenched through football, continues to influence the shape of the world's most popular game, and its participants.

***Professional football is no longer a game. It's a war. And it brings out the same primitive instincts that go back thousands of years.***

***~ Malcolm Allison***

The role of football in the construction of the English empire, as well as the enduring effects highlight the incredible ability of football to captivate the



masses, leaving them susceptible to the manipulative influence of “cultural power.” Still, as the English eventually discovered, there is a critical flaw in using sport and competition to subjugate others: “there [will] always come the day of a colonial victory that might be interpreted as symbolic of general parity” (Stoddart, *Cultural Imperialism* 667). Victory over the East Yorks regiment in 1911 saw Mohan Bagan district – an Indian (Bengali) team – claim the first ever premiership title for an Indian team; and “[c]oming as it did at a time of intense political unrest, the victory was widely regarded as a sign of Indian development, equality, and even superiority” (667). With a single victory, football suddenly became a symbol of strength and a tool of anti-colonial resistance, deflating dominant ideologies and destabilizing imperial authority.

In Argentina, too, football became linked with sentiments of emancipation. By the 1920s Argentina had defeated England (Goldblatt 127), sparking one of the oldest and most heated rivalries in football. Such defeats ultimately proved damaging for England as its global dominance and authority both on and off the pitch came under threat. As football spread and developed across the globe, so too did the both the number and the strength of England’s opponents. Yet, while the other nations successfully challenged the potency of English football and English empire, a great deal of England’s “cultural power” continues to resonate by means of the game. Football’s capacity to captivate the masses and exert cultural power remains thoroughly intact. So too does the

willingness of footballing institutions’ to exploit this ability in order to maintain authority over the game, as well as maintain political and economic interests associated with the game.

With the rise of globally mobile players, the past couple of decades have brought about drastic changes in the ethnoracial complexion of football leagues and national squads the world over. While considered by many as effectively increasing the standard of competition at all levels of the game (Soccernet staff, *Wenger against ban*; Kassimeris 40, 60; Reuters, *Eriksen bemused*), this ethnoracial shift has nevertheless been met with controversy and staunch criticism from media, pundits, institutions and fans. For example, France’s 1998 World Cup winning squad “was dominated by players with non-French origins, and was accordingly denounced by the nationalist leader Jean-Marie Le Pen as ‘artificial’” (Eriksen 50). Essentially, despite this monumental occasion the French victory was devalued because of its “fraudulent” attainment. Italian club *Inter Milan* faced similar accusations in 2010, when it won the UEFA champions league without fielding a single Italian player in the finals (Landolina, *Inter are not Italian*). Again, this victory was not considered a triumph for most Italians. Rather, it sparked questions and concerns regarding the state and future of Italian football and Italian national identity.

***The ball is round. The game lasts ninety minutes. This much is fact.***

***Everything else is theory. ~Sepp Herberger***

This project will examine the ways in which the global mobility of players has unsettled the traditional nationalistic structure of football and the anxious responses by specific football institutions as they struggle to protect their respective political and economic hegemonies over the game. My intention is to expose the recent institutional exploitation of football's cultural power and ability to impassion and mobilize the masses in order to maintain traditional concepts of authority and identity. The first chapter of this project will interrogate the exclusionary selection practices of both the Mexican and the English Football Associations. Both institutions promote ethnoracially singular understandings of national identity as a means of escaping disparaging accusations of "artificiality," thereby protecting the purity and prestige of the nation, as well as the profitability of the national brand. The next chapter will then turn its attention to FIFA's proposed 6+5 policy, arguing that the rule is an institutional effort to constrain and control the traditional structure of football in order to both preserve the profitability of its highly "mediated and commodified spectacle" (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 231) and assert its authority and autonomy in the global realm. The third chapter will assess the English Premier League's home-grown policy – an apparent legislative imitation of the FIFA 6+5 initiative. I will argue

that the home-grown policy is a strategic measure intent on reproducing an ethnoracially singular understanding of English identity in order to strengthen the “English” presence within both the league and the national squad.

CHAPTER 1:  
THE NATIONAL SQUAD SELECTION PRACTICES OF MEXICO AND  
ENGLAND

Given that the Primera División de México pays the highest wages in Latin America, it has long attracted players from around the region – especially South America – with many settling in the country and obtaining Mexican passports. Yet, despite the government’s granting of citizenship status, a strong undercurrent of exclusivity and “national purity” continues to dictate the selection of the national team. During his tenure as the Mexican National Squad coach, Sven-Goran Eriksson constantly noted his “bemuse[ment]” at “the row over his decision to keep picking foreign-born players for his squad” (Reuters, *Eriksen bemused*). Accordingly, Eriksson’s predecessors, Ricardo La Volpe and Hugo Sanchez both admitted that they were regularly chastised by both media and spectators for their decisions to “include naturalized players in [the] squad,” even though they were never explicitly “told that this was prohibited” (*Eriksen bemused*). In a similar vein, the English Football Association openly encourages the selection of Owen Hargreaves – a Canadian born player of Welsh and English heritage – to the national team, while excluding Manuel Almunia – a player of Spanish birth who is eligible to become an English citizen (due to the length of

time he has lived and played in England),<sup>4</sup> and who is hailed by at least one domestic manager as “England’s best goalkeeper” (Soccernet staff, *England’s Best*).

Both instances illustrate a willingness to sacrifice progress in international tournaments, as well as national acclaim – through the reluctance to field the most competitive squad – in order to maintain a traditionally rooted sense of identity. This suggests that for these institutions, the success of the respective national squads is not measured by results on the pitch, but rather by the preservation of specific ethnoracial national identities. Through the interrogation of specific histories and ideologies – notably the invocation of *mestizaje* identity by the Porfirian government in Mexico (and its still pervasive presence in the Mexican national consciousness), England’s imperial legacy, and the legend of the 1966 World Cup – I will expose the problematic and culturally damaging premises on which these institutionally prescribed identities are founded, promoted and perpetuated. Moreover, I will illustrate the ways in which these institutionally endorsed histories and ideologies create violent and intolerant reactions to otherness, resulting in overwrought social realities. An analysis of “national branding” (Comaroff and Comaroff 123) will also prove crucial to understanding the exclusionary practices of football organizations – for, it will

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<sup>4</sup> Almunia has many times stated his desire to play for England, but has yet to complete the citizenship process – at least in part – because of the English F.A.’s apparent disinterest (Sky Sports, *International call*; Soccernet Staff, *England’s best*).

emphasize the need to maintain an ethnoracially specific on-pitch representation in order to maintain the profitability of the national brand. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that the tacit, but pervasive forms of exclusionary regulations used by both the Mexican and English Football Associations are highly calculated measures, meant to curb the effects of the global mobility of players – by instilling through representation in the national squad a ethnoracially singular national character – and protect the hegemonic and economic structures of the organizations.

*Sport is not just about a coach telling you what to do and just following it unthinkingly. ~ Lynn Davies*

Oliver Butler suggests that “[t]hrough successful performances of national teams [the World Cup] provides a reliable platform for displays of national capability and the instilling of national pride” (43). The Mexican F.A., however, through its exclusionary selection practices, complicates this idea of national capability – for it arguably compromises success in international tournaments, such as the World Cup, through its refusal to field the most competitive squad. In fact, national capability in the realm of football is seemingly sacrificed at the expense of a highly mediated understanding of national identity. As such, national pride is not so much instilled by successful performances; rather it is pre-

emptively produced, packaged and put on display at international venues.

National team performances, then, can be understood as a political Endeavour by the Mexican F.A. to disseminate notions of a singular national ethnos.

Discussing the threat of international tournaments to cultural relations, John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson suggest that because of the game's capacity to impassion, as well as the "intrusion" it causes to our daily routine, a football match involving "our" team awakens and pushes to the forefront of public consciousness a sense of national identity that generally lies dormant in the lived reality of most people (*Contest* 9). Essentially, it reminds us not only of who *we* stand against in international competition, but also who *we* stand with in support of *our* own nation. The ethnic construction of the national squad thus becomes a model of national identity used to determine inclusion into, and exclusion from, the national peoplehood. Viewed from this perspective, the Mexican F.A.'s selection practices create divisions within the populace that exclude millions of legally recognized citizens from the national identity, and risk catalyzing what Arjun Appadurai terms "Predatory Identities" – "those whose social construction and mobilization require the extinction of other, proximate social categories, defined as threats to the very existence of some group, defined as we" (*Small Numbers* 51).

Nowhere are these divisions – and aggression – more pronounced than in the El Super Classico – a derby match which sees Club Deportivo Guadalajara



(commonly referred to as Chivas) play rival Club América of Mexico City. As the two most successful clubs in the history of the Mexican Primera División,<sup>5</sup> and the only two clubs never to have been relegated from the top flight, these meetings “transfix an entire nation, with even supporters of the other Mexican league clubs picking a side for the day of the match” (Lehman, *Classic Rivalry*). Moreover, the atmosphere of these games is fiercely intense, with many encounters giving way to violent play on the pitch and massive brawls in the stands (Lehman, *Classic Rivalry*). However, the rivalry between these two clubs runs far deeper than mere sporting competition or the pursuit of league dominance. The rampant violence and animosity between these clubs proves to be firmly rooted in cultural politics.

While utterly dominant during the 1950’s and 1960’s, Chivas’s success has been limited to only three Primera División titles since. Yet despite the club’s minimal success in recent years, it remains “by some distance” (FIFA.com, *Classic Football*) Mexico’s most popular team. This unfaltering support stems from Chivas’s policy of fielding only Mexican-born players. Conversely, Club América, despite its equally prolific – and more recent – record of success, has met with a great deal of opposition from Mexican fans because of its substantial spending and recruitment of foreign players (Lehman, *Classic Rivalry*). This racially charged devotion and seeming disregard for either club’s sporting record

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<sup>5</sup> Chivas has 11 Primera División championship titles compared to América’s 10.

highlights a widely held commitment to prioritize ethnoracial purity over sporting success. Moreover, it produces divisions within the population that excludes millions of legally-recognized citizens from the national identity.

What is perhaps most unsettling about Mexico's multicultural intolerance is the skewed logic which fuels it. Reinforcing the authentic image of his club, Chivas owner Jorge Vergara proclaims Guadalajara to be the "most Mexican city," because it has produced the three most Mexican things- 'tequila, mariachi, and Chivas'" (Lehman, *Classic Rivalry*). As a Guadalajaran native, a certain amount of local and national pride can be inferred from Vergara's statement. However, given his entrepreneurial background and zealous commercialization of the club – Chivas brand cola, bottled water, tequila and even perfumes, are but a few of the products being peddled in stores and online<sup>6</sup> – Vergara's postured authenticity should also be considered as a broader attempt to capitalize on cultural identity in order to further the club's economic growth. As John and Jean Comaroff argue, this commodification of culture – what they call "Ethnicity Inc." – has the perilous "capacity to naturalize cultural identities at the expense of other kinds of collective consciousness, [in order to] conjure up communities of belonging and invest them with affect" (143). This consolidation of culture for commercial purposes ultimately subordinates a large portion of Mexico's multicultural population. Identities, such as the Indigenous peoples, Mexican-

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<sup>6</sup> See for example: <http://www.catalogochivas.com>

Africans and Mexican-Asians – whose presence is deeply entrenched in Mexican history (Gerstle 286-7) – as well as the Latin American diaspora, who make up a large portion of the Primera División, are essentially omitted or glossed over in order to construct a (commercially agreed upon) profitable product. In this light, Vergara's promotion of "most mexicanness" proves not only dubious in its exploitation of culture for profit, but also precarious, in its reinforcement of narrowly defined social boundaries that generate intolerance of difference.

Regardless of his motives, however, Vergara's promotion of authenticity conveniently ignores the historical roots of the club. Chivas – originally named Club de Fútbol Unión – was founded in 1906 by Belgian Edgar Everaert. In 1908, amid brewing national tensions that would eventually catalyze the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Everaert, wanting to "forge a stronger bond with the city" (FIFA.com, *Classic Clubs*), changed the team's name to Club Deportivo Guadalajara. Accompanying the name change was the implementation of the Mexican-born policy, which ousted numerous – founding member – French players. Despite the exclusionary player policy, Everaert remained at the helm of the team.<sup>7</sup> Like Vergara, Everaert realized the value of national sentiment and exploited this emotional current in order to ensure the prosperity of *his* club. Such exploitation, along with the inconsistencies and exceptions in both the club's

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<sup>7</sup> Presently, the Mexican-born policy still does not translate to coaching staff/management (Nationmaster.com, *Encyclopedia: Chivas de Guadalajara*).

history and the team selection policy, bring into question the authentic image of the club. As such, Vergara's present-day posturing serves to reproduce a myth which, replicating national policy (to be discussed shortly), empties the club of its history – at least in public consciousness – and provides an effective means of interpellating the national peoplehood.

According to Appadurai, majority identities – such as Chivas' and the Mexican national squad's fan base – turn predatory when faced with an "anxiety of incompleteness" regarding the purity of their national identity (*Small Numbers* 53). He writes,

Numerical majorities can become predatory and ethnocidal with regard to *small numbers* precisely when some minorities (and their small numbers) remind these majorities of the small gap which lies between their condition as majorities and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted national ethnos. (8 *emphasis original*)

Put simply, the Other, despite his and her minority presence and already marginalized social position becomes a frustrating reminder of a failed national project. This, in turn, triggers anxiety over self-preservation and, consequently, incites a need to purge and purify – for, as Achille Mbembe argues, "national survival is borne out by keeping death at bay, by ensuring that if there is to be death it is the death of those not one's own" (qtd. in Goldberg 27). And since this violent purification process proves an exercise in futility – given our globalized

world of “blurred boundaries... and other deep connectivities” – an endless cycle of violence and anger seems inevitable (*Small Numbers* 11).

The “Mexican-born” selection practice of the national squad promises an equally volatile climate, as it seems founded on an equally problematic myth. During the 1990s, state policies shifted to an understanding of Mexico as a multi-cultural nation (Chong, qtd. in Vom Hau 136). However, as the Mexican selection policy and the sentiments it arouses in the national peoplehood suggest, there remains a huge disjunction between the new state policy and social reality within the nation.<sup>8</sup> Prior to the multi-cultural shift, notions of *mestizaje* had dominated socio-political discourses regarding nationhood for well over a hundred years. Although a complex – and often contradictory term – *mestizaje* essentially involves an ethnic emulsion, underpinned by the idea that “the best hybrid [...] emerge[s] from the interaction of indigenous and European stock” (Gerstle 283). At first glance, this seemingly inclusive approach to racial politics portrays Mexico as both tolerant and progressive in comparison to colonial ideologies, which perceived racial mixing as a taint to the unparalleled purity of European stock.

Put forward in the 1880s by the Porfirian government as the ideal mixture of ethnicities, the concept of *mestizaje* was intended as a unifying ideology meant

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<sup>8</sup> Given football’s ability to incite fervent expressions of national identity, it might even be argued that the Mexican F.A.’s intolerant attitude towards multi-cultural ideals is, at least partly, responsible for this disjunction.

to aid the state's modernization project. The Porfirian state recognized that a national project requires national participation; thus, in order for its mandate of economic and industrial expansion to succeed, a sense of cohesion among Mexicans would be absolutely critical. Yet, as Gary Gerstle argues, "[in] the early years of independence... efforts to fashion a polity in Mexico... proved difficult, as centrifugal regionalist forces frustrated efforts to unify the Creole elite around a common political authority and identity" (279). With its broad definition – "the mixture" (Rinderle 298) – and inclusionary quality, the concept of *mestizaje* offered an ideal means of incorporating the fragmented population into collective entity. To further fuel this agenda, national rhetoric and discourse shifted abruptly, re-framing understandings of Mexican history and identity:

[The Porfirian state] reviv[ed] an older nationalist narrative about how the Aztecs of the 1300s and 1400s had built a civilization rivaling those of ancient Greece and Egypt. The Aztecs, in other words, had already demonstrated how Indian peoples could fashion Mexico into a mighty nation and a glorious culture... [such] efforts to recognize the importance of an Indian heritage to the construction of Mexican nationhood allowed more and more Mexicans, including those outside elite circles, to glimpse that their nation's greatness lay in the racially mixed character of its population. (Gerstle 281-2)

In one sense, this resuscitation of history and recognition of past civilizations proves a monumental step towards repairing the racial injuries that had plagued the nation for centuries. By shifting the national perspective so as to understand, rather than ignorantly condemn Indigenous cultures, sensitivity towards race/ism was both projected by the government and instilled in the peoplehood.

In another sense, though, this (mis)representation of Mexican history fails to address the cultural tension and heinous violence that arose during Spanish colonial contact with the Indigenous peoples of Mexico. Essentially, this romanticization of their meeting and mixing serves to dangerously and disrespectfully rid Mexico's history of meaning and truth, in order to further the self-serving agenda of the government. Not only does this institutionally encouraged amnesia devalue the promising revival of a repressed past, but also, it embodies what David Theo Goldberg terms "antiracialism" – a form of racial discrimination which involves "giv[ing] up on race before and without addressing the legacy, the roots, the scars of racism's histories, the weights of race" (21). In other words, "antiracialism" postures as a commitment to racial harmony, a forged vision of a time and space that has moved past racism. Yet, in actual fact, race, itself is passed over, erasing tangible connections to histories of depreciation and degradation, and effectively closing off the channels necessary for legitimate reconciliation.

The myth of *mestizaje*, then, although promoted as a unifying ideology proves more so a homogenizing force – for it wipes away the uniqueness and diversity of race and culture within the nation, reducing all persons, instead, to a single, simplified category. José Vasconcelos – Mexican secretary of public education from 1921-4 and key architect of the revolutionary regime’s cultural policies – declared that “[s]o thorough and rich was the process of mixing the blood of peoples as different as the Indians and Europeans... that the resulting hybrid race really did contain ‘all the world’” (Gerstle 283). Yet, ironically, “all the world” was not welcome under the umbrella of *mestizaje*. In 1931, the Mexican government started exiling Chinese residents because “they [allegedly] do not represent a step forward in the ideal of *mestizaje*... but rather signify a step backward in the anthropological search for the prototypical [Mexican] man” (José María Dávila, qtd. in Gerstle 287). Looking beyond this cryptic reasoning, Gerstle argues that “Chinese entrepreneurialism... had brought these immigrants disproportionate influence” (286) and that “Mexican resentment of the Chinese escalated as the latter’s regional prominence and affluence grew” (287). Through successful business endeavors, the Chinese had garnered immense economic and political strength over the northwest state of Sonora.<sup>9</sup> In fact, “[i]n nine Sonoran towns Chinese immigrants owned all the businesses” (287). This symbol of prosperity inevitably promoted a continued flow of Chinese immigration into the

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<sup>9</sup> Gerstle identifies the region of Sonora as the predominant location of Chinese settlement (287).



region. From the Mexican perspective though, the success and power of this growing Chinese population signaled a reversal in the ethnoracial dynamic of the nation. In the words of Appadurai, the “majorit[y] and minorit[y] [could] plausibly be seen as being in danger of trading places” (52). As such, there was a dire need to purge the nation of this threatening foreign presence and restore the prosperity of the Mexican (*mestizaje*) identity – “the prototypical Mexican man.”

Ultimately, this homogenizing force, this drive towards national purity problematizes the unifying promises of *mestizaje* – for it only brings people together through a selective and highly controlled erasure of difference, rather than an acceptance and appreciation of difference. As such, it merely reframes the terms of exclusion in line with a specific political agenda. Furthermore, the extrusion of undesirable others – such as the Chinese – in order to protect the “prototypical” Mexican not only resonates in a similar tone to the selection policies of both Chivas and the Mexican national squad, but also, highlights a sense of racial superiority built in to the national understanding of *mestizaje*. As Gerstle points out, there is a belief that the highly controlled and restricted mixing of *mestizaje* “endow[s] the nation with *uncommon* vigor and valor” (*emphasis added* 282). While this could simply be read as a statement of national pride, the obvious insecurity surrounding the stability of this unparalleled “vigor and valor” suggests that pride has in fact transformed into vanity. And according to

Appadurai, it is this type of aggressive narcissism that mobilizes predatory identities (11).

The Mexican F.A.'s continued adherence to *mestizaje* ideology – or at least something uncannily akin to it – thus poses a legitimate threat to the racial climate of the nation. Moreover, by assuming control over the definition of national identity, the Mexican F.A.'s selection practice also robs Mexicans – even those belonging to the ethnoracially singular national peoplehood – of their respective democratic voices. Gerstle argues that “the shared and special nature of national identity allowed individuals who possessed it to press democratic claims on the state in the name of the nation” (279). Therefore, despite the politically manipulative intentions of *mestizaje*, every individual belonging to the national peoplehood should have the ability to participate in the shaping of the nation: regardless of the vision or the outcome it should be a collective project. However, through the exclusion of foreign-born players the F.A. effectively demonstrates its capacity and willingness to undermine government policy and shape the nation as it sees fit. John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson argue that “football in particular, ha[s] proven to be [a] significant theatre for the working-up and expression of national identity, and, in its mobilized form, nationalism” (*Contest* 8). And as a non-government institution, the Mexican F.A. is able to arouse and exploit both the game and the nationalistic sentiments it arouses without any – or at least a very limited – accountability to Mexican citizens. As such, the democratizing

potential of national identity formation is ultimately nullified by the F.A.'s autocratic ambitions.

*In football everything is complicated by the presence of the opposite team. ~Jean Paul Sartre*

Unlike Mexico, which is trying to forge a future by redrafting the past, England appears to be desperately clutching to the past in order to avoid confronting the present. As noted in the introduction, football was employed by the English as a means of establishing and maintaining imperial power. The control exerted over other peoples, as well as over the game itself, fed not only England's sense of national superiority, but also its sense of ownership over football as *the* inventor of the game. While England's control over other nations and the game has waned somewhat since the end of colonial rule and the emergence of formerly oppressed nations, its sense of authority and ownership still persists.

Discussing the racial and cultural diversity in English league football, former England coach Steve Bridges states that "[t]here are many cultural and language barriers, and to get the best out of [these players] we need to integrate *them* into *our* style of doing things" (*emphasis added*, qtd. in King 182). Bridges' statement indicates the sharp dichotomy that defines who fits inside and who is

forced outside the boundaries of “English” football. Beyond this, though, his statement further suggests a need for otherness to be assimilated into an English “style of doing things,” rather than considered or adopted as potentially gainful or advantageous. Essentially, otherness is discredited and discounted despite the enormous success of “foreign” football on the global stage since the emergence of international matches in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Such rigid thinking emphasizes the desire within English football to eliminate difference rather than work with it, and suggests that – from an English perspective – the “us” / “them” dichotomy applies not only to English football, but to football in general.

Crucial to this sense of superiority and ownership over football is the 1966 World Cup, which was hosted by England, but more importantly, won by England for the first, and only time in the tournament’s history. Embedded in the national consciousness of 1966 was the idea that “football is coming home” (Kassimeris 41) – that the game, after many years of foreign appropriation, was finally being returned to its rightful owner. This understanding portrays football not as *the people’s game* – as its epithet suggests – but rather as a game others are allowed to participate in only so long as England allows it. England’s eventual triumph in the finals further fed this sense of dominance, creating a mythical moment that continues to reverberate in the present day. In England’s current 2018/2022 World

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<sup>10</sup> One might also consider the massive influx of foreign players being imported into the English Premier League as an indication of the quality of *other* “styles of doing things.”

Cup bid book is a letter from Prince William of Wales – currently the president of England’s Football Association – to FIFA president Sepp Blatter. He writes,

I have been brought up on stories of that legendary time... [and] the chance of the Football Association being given the opportunity to do honor to the memories of 1966 by producing for FIFA a World Cup Finals to be ranked alongside the greatest, makes me and every sport-loving Englishman yearn for it to happen. (5)

Prince William’s letter illustrates the transformation of England’s victory into a sort of folklore, an “invented tradition... which seek[s] to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity... with a suitable historic past” (Hobsbawm 1). Despite the fact that this tale of triumph, or “invented tradition,” has become bloated with exaggeration,<sup>11</sup> its reiteration across generations serves to affirm its legitimacy, effectively entrenching understandings of (white normative) English footballing dominance within the national sphere. In fact, one need only notice the way that Prince William aligns England’s 1966 victory with *Football’s* greatest moment to understand the sustained presence of the myth in national consciousness.

It is also important to note the intrinsic desire “to do honour to the memories of 1966” (Prince William of Wales 5) in England’s current World Cup

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<sup>11</sup> See Tony Mason’s *England 1966 – Traditional and Modern?* for a thorough examination of the flaws and falsities surrounding the legend of 1966.

bid. Embedded in this desire is an attempt to reproduce *that* moment, rather than forge a new and unique locus of national pride. It is as if the future is merely a medium through which to return to, and inhabit the past. Ernest Renan describes this as a sort of selective forgetting, an exercise that found force amid the inception of centralized government, and is an ideal – albeit artificial and unstable – means of creating social cohesion within a nation. He argues that “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common;<sup>12</sup> and also that they have forgotten many things” (1.11). By omitting from public memory the long history of ethnoracial mixing in England,<sup>13</sup> a fantastical image of purity is created which ultimately crystallizes as historical truth in the collective conscious.

This form of national forgetting and delusional fixation on purity proves incredibly important when considering the politics of exclusion that underpin the current selection of the English national squad. Both Owen Hargreaves and Manuel Almunia were born and raised outside of the United Kingdom. Both players were also trained and developed by foreign football clubs.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in terms of football team membership, the “Englishness” of both players – and their

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<sup>12</sup> e.g. the shared triumph of the 1966 World Cup.

<sup>13</sup> “The British isles, considered as a whole, present a mixture of Celtic and Germanic blood, the proportions of which are singularly difficult to define” (Renan 2.7).

<sup>14</sup> Hargreaves was born and raised in Canada. At the age of 16, he moved to Germany to pursue his football career with Bayern Munich. He did not move to England until 2007 when he joined Premier League team Manchester United. At this point, Hargreaves had already played on several occasions for England, having made Under 21 debut in 2000 and his senior squad debut in 2001. Almunia was born in Spain, playing for several Spanish clubs before moving to Premier League team Arsenal in 2004.

respective playing styles – is ultimately questionable. Why then is Hargreaves a near-automatic inclusion in the national squad,<sup>15</sup> while Almunia – heralded as “England’s best goalkeeper” (Soccernet staff, *England’s Best*)<sup>16</sup> – remains unconsidered and pushed to the periphery?

Hargreaves’ English and Welsh parentage proves integral to his “belonging.” Primarily, Hargreaves’ genealogical ties gift him with untainted English blood, which does not threaten to compromise the purity of the national peoplehood. In a sense, Hargreaves, like football in 1966, is “coming home.” Furthermore, through his heritage, Hargreaves remains intimately connected to English culture – for, nationalist sentiment and traditional values, like those passed down through the legend of 1966, have been infused into his character since birth. Of course, this belief problematically ignores the diasporic identity of Hargreaves’ parents, and insists that Englishness is permanent state of being that cannot be corrupted or interrupted by other cultural influences. Nevertheless, Hargreaves becomes an embodiment of Englishness – despite his foreignness – which effectively reinforces the homogenous identity of the national peoplehood. Almunia, conversely, despite his lengthier lived experience in England – a

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<sup>15</sup> Hargreaves was “under consideration” (Harris, *Shock Chance*) for the 2010 World Cup squad despite only recently returning (on May 2, 2010) from a 20 month layoff due to injury, and securing only 20 seconds of game experience.

<sup>16</sup> This statement – and Almunia’s exclusion from the national squad – is made even more significant by the fact that England has long suffered on the international stage due to poor goalkeeping (see for ex. Rabi Ubha’s *God Save the Team*).

criterion which appears inconsequential to inclusion given that Hargreaves made his first international appearance for England roughly 7 years before ever residing in the country – lacks the genealogical connection and cultural inheritance necessary to be embraced by the national peoplehood.

As a result, Almunia proves an intrusive presence – the embodiment of foreignness that is afflicting and negatively affecting the character of the nation. During the 1998 World Cup match between England and Argentina, David Beckham was dismissed for lashing out a foot in frustration following a strong challenge from opponent Simeone. Although this was undoubtedly a display of poor sportsmanship, and certainly warranted disciplining, Beckham's punishment ultimately extended far beyond the sporting sphere. Beckham was blamed by the English press and public for putting the team at a disadvantage, which many believed cost England the match and a premature exit from the tournament. But more than this, Beckham was vilified for bringing the national character in to disrepute. The July 2, 1998 editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* reads,

Beckham has apologised handsomely, but we do not share the matey reaction of Mr Banks or the gentlemanly forgiveness of Sir Bobby Charlton. Beckham's silly little, smart little kick at his Argentinean opponent was what's wrong with the national character. This Gaultier-saronged, Posh-Spiced, Cooled Britannia, look-at-me, coiffed twerp did not, of course, mean any harm... But the good news, which overwhelmed



the bad, is that the other men (13 in all) showed what is impressive in the English character, *past and present*. They were egalitarian and they were excellent, and they did not make the mistake that *to be one you cannot be the other... Love of country has a lot to do with it*; the great psychological, moral, religious perception that it is in giving that we receive has even more... One felt pride in honest English courage which was both patriotic and aesthetic. And all of these feelings crystallised at a particular moment. As an 18-year-old boy [Michael Owen] slipped through the Argentinean cohorts and scored, it seemed right for the whole of England to say: ‘*We’ve seen our future – and it works.*’ (qtd. in Alabarces 558, *emphasis added*)

In this overstated exposé, Beckham’s sporting error is almost entirely overshadowed by his ethnic error. He is depicted as an abhorrent figure, dripping in the foreignness of “sarongs” and “spice,” a sight completely at odds with the “honest English” character. Precisely because of this, Beckham is – as the excerpt suggests – incapable of “loving his country,” and therefore belonging or contributing to his country – for he does not embody or exude what it is to be English. Instead – given his English birth, lineage and upbringing – he evidences the damaging effects of foreign intrusion on the national peoplehood. Thus, it was not a “silly little, smart little kick” that cost the 13 other “egalitarian” and “excellent” players, as well as the entire nation, so dearly; rather it was a

pervading foreignness that lead to the downfall of the team and the nation. According to Appadurai, it is this fear of foreign infection causing national demise – the belief in a “threatened majority” – that “turn[s] a benign social identity into a predatory identity” (*Small Numbers* 51). As the editorial suggests, the saving grace of England’s performance – and the envisioned path to a successful future – ultimately proved the united display of “honest English courage” from 13 players on the pitch, who set about repairing the damage inflicted by the foreign other. England’s future, its national survival, thus, seemingly relies on a return to traditional values and identity – which invariably entails the extrusion of foreign presence, like Almunia, from the national sphere.

Pre-emptive measures against future ethnoracial threats are currently being put in place by the English F.A. Since 2001, the F.A. has invested £25 million – of a planned £100 million – in the creation of the National Football Centre (NFC) – a state of the art training facility which “aim[s] to reverse the influx of foreign coaches into the English game” (Soccernet staff, *football centre*).<sup>17</sup> While much promise can be gleaned from this investment – notably an emphasis on attaining and maintaining the highest standard of football development – the overarching motivation behind the construction of the NFC appears a blatant institutional effort to control, if not eradicate, foreign influence from the English game. The

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<sup>17</sup> Ironically, this facility was inspired by similar facilities in France, Italy, Holland and Germany, and ultimately modelled after Spanish club Real Madrid’s training centre (Soccernet Staff, *football centre*).

NFC, essentially, is as much a football training facility as it is a cultural training facility, endeavoring to retrench understandings of white normative Englishness.

This investment in cultural preservation, however, seems somewhat overzealous given the drastic underrepresentation of ethnic minorities in football institutions, not to mention the complete absence of ethnic minorities in the English F.A. As Christos Kassimeris reveals, despite an “equal opportunity policy in place and advertise[d]” (101), “[a]ll fourteen members of the Football Association board and the ninety-two members of the council described themselves as white” (91). Without question, the entirely white face of the institution problematizes the potency of self-imposed and regulated equal opportunity policies – for in this instance, it appears nothing more than a veneer used to conceal an operation where race trumps credentials. In effect, inclusion in the institution assumes inclusion in the ethnically singular, white normative national peoplehood.

Colin King reinforces this claim, suggesting that the English F.A., as well as almost all other English football institutions, operates on a system of personal relationships and informal networks, which “are formatted by the ways in which white men create rules of inclusion” (181). This informal arrangement of authority bypasses soft policies concerning equal opportunity, effectively closing down spaces to question racism, while simultaneously erecting invisible barriers that reiterate forms of racist expression. Ultimately, this system allows for only

two possible – and neither favorable – outcomes for racial minorities: exclusion or subservience; and as the wholly white complexion of the institution makes abundantly clear, exclusion prevails. The F.A.’s mandate of exclusion is further evidenced through its promotion and implementation of a “home-grown rule”<sup>18</sup> which seeks to increase the production of “English” players, thereby lessening and limiting – through both a quota system and implicitly imposed market forces – the presence of foreign others within the English game.<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, this insistence on exclusion underlines a sense of insecurity in the white normative identity of the English Football Association. Amid the changing complexion of organized football, due in no small part to the global mobility of players – particularly the emergence of African and Asian footballing nations over the past half century (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 20) – the F.A.’s system of collusion and exclusion strategically operates as a means of preserving a hegemony over the face and structure of *its* game.

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<sup>18</sup> The complexities and racist implications of this policy will be examined in chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> The exclusionary nature of the home-grown policy will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

*I would not be bothered if we lost every game as long as we won the league. ~ Mark Viduka*

The English F.A.'s mandate of exclusion is also underpinned by a need to protect the economic capacity of the national team image. As Steve Fenton argues, "[t]he idea of 'nation'... both in history and in the present... almost always expresses some sectional purpose on behalf of part of the whole [sic]. In nation-formation there have been groups with a particular stake in the 'national idea' and in the present most nationalisms are in some way divisive" (162). Beyond overseeing football operations in England, the F.A. is also a financially-driven corporation. With an annual revenue of £261.8 million (The Football Association 12),<sup>20</sup> the English F.A.'s stake in the "national idea" is substantial. Essentially, the F.A. is not simply selling material goods, it is also selling a highly controlled national image. England's football shirt<sup>21</sup> along with all other football related merchandise is adorned with a crest of 3 lions, modeled after the England coat of arms. This badge functions as a cultural icon, tying England's modern image and football culture to its imperial past (Kassimeris 41), and framing national identity within outmoded ideas of racial purity and superiority. As national iconography proves virtually immovable once established, England's badge essentially

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<sup>20</sup> For the year 2008

<sup>21</sup> The replica shirt is the most popular form of merchandise sold to English fans (Howard and Sayce 4.2).

becomes a staple of culture, foregrounding traditional trains of thought, even amid a dynamic, multi-cultural space.

But this badge does more than simply tie England's contemporary football identity to imperial past. It also functions as a commercial brand – a symbol of commodified culture. Through appropriation and manipulation of both imagery and history, the English F.A. has successfully managed to convert English culture into a consumable product that articulates its exclusionary understanding of Englishness. The rigidly controlled reproduction of this iconography reinforces its symbolic connections to the past and strengthens the staying power of the emblem. In effect, England's badge can be considered an "invented tradition," for its "continuity with [the past] is largely factitious" (Hobsbawm 2) and institutionally imposed. Moreover, the F.A.'s misleading use of history and iconography transforms "nationality [into] an object of 'ownership'" (Comaroff and Comaroff 123). This creates a precarious situation where English persons – even those belonging to the ethnically prescribed national peoplehood – are no longer proprietors of their own culture. Instead, they prove an exploitable resource used to generate profits and perpetuate narrowly-defined notions of identity. Moreover, by trademarking its "product," the F.A. is granted certain legal rights and protections regarding representations of "English" identity (131), which helps solidify the hegemonic and economic position of the organization.

John and Jean Comaroff suggest that while branded nationality appears to be “the property of those ‘millions of people’ who share an ‘emotional identification’ through it... It is meant... for ‘commercial’ engagement with the ‘tourist,’ as if it were in the interaction between here and elsewhere that [a nation] recognizes itself and fixes its place in the world” (123). Essentially, this process of marketing culture re-inscribes the boundaries of “belonging” based on binary understandings of identity. In short, the national peoplehood is defined, and defines itself, against the other. As such, a paradoxical situation emerges where the national peoplehood needs the *other* in order to comprehend its own identity, yet, simultaneously needs to eliminate the other in order to protect the purity of its identity. Such paradoxes inevitably create “profound doubts about who exactly are among the ‘we’ and who are among the ‘they’” (Appadurai, *Small Numbers* 5), and mobilizes violence and anger as a process of detection and/or self-identification (6).

For example, following England’s 1-1 draw to Sweden in the first round of the 2002 World Cup, 200 England supporters in Hull “began hunting down asylum seekers” (S. King, *Racial Violence*). This violent outburst resulted in multiple assaults, damage to shop fronts and vehicles, as well as bricks and bottles being hurled at intervening police (*Racial Violence*). This was not an isolated incident either; that same day, following that same match, a group of more than 50 men in Burnley “descend[ed] on a predominantly Asian area of the town...

chanting ‘Fight the Pakis’” (*Racial Violence*). After being pushed back by the police, “the large group began rampaging through the town centre, shouting and chanting racial abuse” (*Racial Violence*). Unlike many other instances of racially-charged football violence in England, where aggression and anger is directed at the ethnic group related to England’s respective football opponent,<sup>22</sup> the violence in these incidents is displaced onto uninvolved ethnoracial groups that are considered both outside and detrimental to the (white normative) English order. In other words, racialized minorities in general – rather than immediate football opposition or even a poor performance from the English team itself – are made responsible for England’s downfall.

The politically-loaded nature of the chants, however, suggests that this (perceived) downfall extends beyond the realm of football. The calculated targeting of “asylum-seekers” and “Pakis” underlines the perceived threat of foreign-presence or otherness to state of the nation – for, as Sam King argues, the recent “media and political hysteria over Islamic fundamentalists and asylum seekers [has resulted in] a rising number of football gangs once again turning to political violence” (*Racial Violence*). The predatory behavior of football fans, thus, proves a response to socio-political events in the world at large, functioning as a sort of bonding experience meant to build kinship ties and consolidate group identity through identification and an overzealous rejection of difference.

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<sup>22</sup> See for example, Jamie Wilson’s article “Portuguese targeted by hooligans.”



The commodification of identity for the purpose of “commercial engagement with tourists” also illustrates an ironic willingness to sell foreigners – those so fiercely rejected – a cultural artifact, to allow them to participate in the reproduction of a specific national idea, while refusing to tolerate their presence within that same imagined community. This illustrates a strange reliance on foreign investment in order to economically prop up the exclusionary structure of the organization. The investment of the national peoplehood in this national brand, moreover, proves taxing – both fiscally and emotionally – for, as the Comaroff’s suggest, this commodification of identity “marked a shift in the very conception of nationhood, one in which the commonweal itself congeals in the brand and *its* success or failure” (*emphasis original* 124). The national peoplehood thus relies on the success of the brand to determine the success of the nation; and ironically, the success of the brand relies on the national peoplehood to protect the F.A.’s national idea, both financially and ideologically.

The exclusionary selection practices of the English F.A. also serve to secure the hegemonic position and economic interests of the institution. While the 3 lions of England’s crest represents an understanding of imperial authority and ethnic singularity, meaning is inherently malleable and “actively create[d] according to a complex interplay of codes” (Chandler 10); and since, “[t]hrough the mass spectacle of international contests, sportsmen representing their nation or state [become] primary expressions of their imagined communities” (Hobsbawm,

qtd. in Alabarces 548), there is a danger that changes in the squad's ethnoracial composition could compromise the imperial character of the F.A., as well as the economic viability of the England brand.<sup>23</sup> Because of this, the F.A. has a vested interest in maintaining an ethnoracially-singular definition of national identity. Foreign players, thus, despite their citizenship status or lived experience (e.g. Almunia), appear a threat to the traditional view of the "English" population and the continued economic stability of the F.A.

The legitimacy of this threat, however, proves questionable. The early months of 2010 saw a scandal break in British politics when documents surfaced suggesting that the Labour party had, over the past decade, "secretly" relaxed immigration controls in a "deliberate attempt to engineer a 'truly multicultural' country and plug gaps in the jobs market" (Andrew Neather, qtd. in Slack, *Multicultural UK*). As a result, immigration in the U.K. reportedly increased from 370,000 in 2001 to 510,000 in 2006 (Slack, *Multicultural UK*). While the secrecy of this shift in social policy, as well as the revelation of a dramatically increased

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<sup>23</sup> This brings up questions and complications regarding the acceptance of black players in the national squad. Although colour based racism continues to pervade English football (see for example, Chritos Kassimeris' *European football in black and white*), there seems to be a certain tolerance towards the inclusion of black players in the national squad. John Barnes argues that "[f]rom an athletic point of view there will be black people because athletically we are equal, from a managerial perspective it's more to do with the intellectual aspect of it and I don't think we are regarded as intellectually equal" (qtd. in Kassimeris 60). Speaking about the complete lack of administrative / managerial representation of ethnoracial minorities in English football, Barnes underscores the skewed mentality of both the national peoplehood and football institutions which are willing to exploit "black athleticism" while simultaneously rejecting "black intellectualism." Although riddled with racist assumptions, this mentality might nevertheless account for the curious acceptance of black players in the national squad.

foreign presence sparked outrage among politicians and the public, there was ironically no real noticeable effects on the national dynamic before the news emerged. In fact, a 2005 poll shows that amid the apex of foreign arrival, and just shortly after the July 7<sup>th</sup> bomb attacks, 62% of the national population believed “multiculturalism makes Britain a better place to live” (BBC, *UK majority*). Yet, once the increase in immigration became public knowledge, the Labour party received immense criticism for both its deception and its multicultural objectives – mainly from the white working class (Green, *Paying the price*). Andrew Green further argues that the “social objective of greatly increased diversity was entirely suppressed for fear of [such] public reaction” (*Paying the price*).

The English F.A. finds itself faced with similar social pressures. Much like the Labour government, who felt it necessary to conceal the rising non-white population – despite its imperceptible effects on the lived experience of most Britons – the English F.A. strives to maintain traditional understandings of national representation in order to protect its own socio-political stature. The F.A.’s position is, however, far more precarious given the hyper-visibility of the national team. Put simply, the F.A. is not able to mask its diversity because of the scrutinous gaze of the white-normative national peoplehood – for, as Kassimeris notes, “white supporters dominate the terraces... their numbers have never failed reaching at least 96 percent of the crowd” (95).<sup>24</sup> Despite the (increasing)

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<sup>24</sup> According to research conducted between 2000-2006.

multicultural complexion of the nation, football's audience remains almost homogenously white. This ethnoracial dynamic complicates notions of multiculturalism as a mixing and merging of equals – especially in football – as it places the white normative majority in a position to dictate the boundaries of national identity. As such, the threat to the structural stability of the F.A. proves simultaneously real and imagined. In one sense, the threat is constructed by the national peoplehood and thrust upon the F.A., showing the selection practices to be heavily influenced by external socio-political forces. In another sense, by placating such external forces, the F.A. is effectively reinvesting the ethnoracially singular English identity with meaning, thereby fuelling the forces that threaten its hegemonic position. This circular process ultimately invokes a perpetual sense of insecurity and anxiety regarding the ethnoracially diverse state of both the nation and English football.

*I fell in love with football as I would later fall in love with women:*

*suddenly, uncritically, giving no thought to the pain it would bring.*

*~ Nick Hornby*

Zygmunt Bauman argues that “consumption of an identity should not – must not – extinguish the desire for other, new and improved identities, nor preclude the ability to absorb them” (*New Poor* 29). Therefore, a national

peoplehood should not, or as Bauman posits, cannot accept a limited and limiting national identity – especially one as narrowly defined as those propagated by both the English and the Mexican Football Associations. As mentioned earlier, “the shared and special nature of national identity allow[s] individuals who possess it to press democratic claims on the state in the name of the nation” (Gerstle 279). National identity, then, can prove an empowering proposition, offering a voice to many – regardless of social status – thereby creating a nation that has been shaped and molded by a true collective. What is crucial in Gerstle’s statement, however, is that one must “possess” national identity in order to be heard, in order to participate in the shaping of the nation. And access to identity is currently being barred by the practices of the Mexican and English Football Associations, respectively.

Both organizations have claimed ownership over the national identity of their respective country. The Mexican F.A.’s commitment to *mestizaje*(-esque) understandings of nationhood – that ultimately prizes (a skewed and illusive notion of) purity over sporting success – creates damaging divisions within the populace that excludes millions of legally recognized citizens from the national image. This subversion of governmental authority and policy illustrates an institutional willingness to sacrifice the rights of many in order to curb the effect of the global mobility of players, and protect its own identity. Moreover, the cultural inheritance of those included in this prescribed national idea is effectively

reduced, as the F.A.'s vision of nationhood is historically hollow, and thus, devoid of meaning. Ultimately, the Mexican F.A.'s exclusionary selection practices and commitment to ethnoracial singularity suggest, perhaps, a certain insecurity concerning the nation's place in the global football community. As an emerging strength in both the sporting side and the business side<sup>25</sup> of football, the Mexican F.A. is seemingly portraying and positioning Mexico as a nation that can, and will, achieve success – both on the pitch and in the international community – without assistance from “others.” Football, for the Mexican F.A., thus, becomes a medium through which to showcase the potential and potency of pure, uncompromised Mexican capability.

Similarly, the English F.A.'s exclusionary selection practices and push for ethnoracial singularity seems an attempt to assert the autonomous abilities of “English” identity. The English F.A.'s motivation, however, seems driven by an attempt not to claim, but rather, reclaim authority over *its* game. Fuelled by myths, legends and “invented traditions” regarding England's football superiority, as well as a compulsive need to promote England's role as inventor of the game, the F.A.'s vision of England's footballing future appears nothing more than a re-articulation of the past. As such, its survival relies on a return to traditional values

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<sup>25</sup> Mexico has twice hosted the World Cup (1970 & 1986), and shown notable progress in its capitalist prowess – from “amateurish marketing and advertising practices” in 1970 to a place where “[FIFA] could do business” in 1986 (Goldblatt 636).

and interpretations of identity. This invariably entails the elimination of foreign presence from the national space.

## CHAPTER 2:

### FIFA'S 6+5 POLICY

By the start of the 2012-13 season, Le Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the governing body of world football, intends to implement a “6+5” rule “designed to limit the number of foreign players in domestic leagues” (Soccernet staff, *EU and FIFA clash*). The 6+5 rule states that at the start of a game a club must field at least six players who would be eligible for the national team of the country. The policy is meant to both protect the interests of national teams through a continued emphasis on indigenous youth development and to maintain equality at the club level by preventing more affluent clubs from simply importing a team of top quality players from countries around the globe (Soccernet staff, *EU and FIFA clash*). Despite this seemingly altruistic platform, though, one must consider the inherent discriminatory and exclusionary implications of the policy. By narrowly defining the parameters of nationality, the 6+5 policy fails to address the complexities of national identities – especially in the context of a globalized world of blurred boundaries, social and cultural mobility, and numerous other “deep connectivities” (Appadurai, *Small Numbers* 11). Furthermore, FIFA's 6+5 policy neglects to consider the economic inequalities between clubs that plague domestic leagues and perpetrate injustice.



This chapter will unpack FIFA's "mission of equality" myth to argue that the recently proposed 6+5 policy is an institutional effort to constrain and control the structure of football in order to both preserve the profitability of the its highly "mediated and commodified spectacle" (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 231), as well as assert its authority and autonomy on the world stage. Through examination of the constructed and problematic definition of national identity prescribed by the 6+5 policy, I will argue that FIFA threatens to entrench a precarious notion of ethnic singularity within national communities. Underscoring FIFA's awareness that the 6+5 policy excludes and discriminates against players based on race, my analysis will then consider the exploitative character of the institution. Masquerading as a democratic organization, FIFA, in fact, operates as an autocracy that prioritizes economic growth and global authority above all else. The reign of João Havelange as FIFA president (1974-98) proves crucial to this discussion – for not only does he embody the narcissistic nature of the organization, but also, he acted as the driving force behind FIFA's movement into the market. Recognizing football's potential as a commodity, Havelange (as the face of FIFA) embarked on a project of global expansion. Yet as connections grew, and players moved between footballing nations, the nationalist structure of FIFA's highly profitable events – mainly the World Cup – came under threat. Thus, in a world of global mobility and ethnic complexities, the 6+5 policy

appears to be FIFA's attempt to repair the fractures and fissures in the traditional – and lucrative – structure of the game.

This chapter will further suggest that the hypernationalistic objectives of the 6+5 policy are attempts by European – especially British – institutions to recuperate their faltering hegemony over the game. By exploring the politics of the 2002 Japan/Korea World Cup bid, as well as the subsequent installation of Sepp Blatter as FIFA president, I intend to underline both the duplicitous manner by which FIFA maximizes commercial capabilities and the European efforts to reclaim control of *their* game. Directing attention to the turmoil and exploitation that operates within the institution will allow me to problematize the harmonious image of the FIFA family and puncture the myth of institutional equality. The 6+5 policy, this chapter argues, is merely a means for FIFA to protect its own identity and objectives, regardless of the effect on the rights and identities – both individual and national – of its players and fans.

*Soccer is not about justice. It's a drama - and criminally wrong  
decisions against you are part and parcel of that. ~Pete Davies*

Due to the 6+5 policy's purported focus on youth development, many football pundits have come out in support of FIFA's proposal. Jose Mourinho – manager of Italian Serie A club Inter Milan – posits that “[he is] not concerned

about the exact number, 3+3 or 4+4 or 5+5, that's not the point. But [what is of concern is] the philosophy of teams look[ing] to youth policy and youth development” (Soccernet Staff, *Mourinho voices support*). Essentially, Mourinho is attempting to root his argument strictly in a sporting logic devoid of cultural or political implications or attachments. He sees the 6+5 policy as an ideal measure to re-focus club priorities through an investment in not only the future of the club, but also, in the future of the game. Yet, as Mourinho furthers his position, he – although seemingly unaware – stumbles into the precarious realm of nationalistic discourse which underpins the debate about the 6+5 policy:

[T]he world is global, football is global, we cannot be too much concerned about nationalities, but I think the clubs, they must invest in their formation, in players made in the club, made in the country... I think this is also about the empathy between the team and the fans... people can create a better relation with the team when they feel the nationality is there. (qtd. in Soccernet staff, *Mourinho voices support*)

The slippage in Mourinho’s statement reveals the intricate and crucial role that sport plays in the construction of national consciousness – for, as Eric Hobsbawn argues, “the imagined community of millions seems more real as a team of eleven named people” (qtd. in Mason 94).

However, the genealogical ties purportedly encouraged by FIFA’s policy assume a sense of “naturalness” within group identity (Appadurai, *Small Numbers*

83), which ultimately proves tenuous. Derisive chants of “a black Italian does not exist” (Reuters, *racist chant*), aimed at Mario Balotelli, a player of Italian birth but Ghanaian descent – and coincidentally a product of Jose Mourinho’s Inter Milan youth program – have recently echoed throughout stadiums across Italy, becoming almost commonplace in the Italian game. These shameful demonstrations highlight the ways in which diversity and global mobility have complicated the boundaries of *Italianess*, creating “predatory identities” whose “idea of national peoplehood is reduced to the principle of ethnic singularity so that the existence of even the smallest minority within national boundaries is seen as an intolerable deficit in the purity of the national whole” (*Small Numbers* 53). This intolerable impurity essentially creates a sense of inadequacy within the national peoplehood, which ultimately manifests itself through violence and anger. David Theo Goldberg makes a similar claim, arguing that race “is about the manufacture of homogeneities, [and] racisms [are employed to] police their boundaries” (Goldberg 5). Thus, despite possessing an Italian birth certificate, Balotelli nevertheless lacks the skin of a white normative *Italian* ethnos. As such, he finds himself accused of breaching the borders of “ethnic singularity,” and is expelled from the realm of national peoplehood.

Given the hypernationalistic nature of the 6+5 policy, it unquestionably risks exacerbating the predatory tendencies of a national peoplehood. By reducing the parameters of nationality to an ethnoracially singular identity, the 6+5 policy

threatens to spur a sense of national self-consciousness, demanding that the people “militarize their borders [and] patrol their places of possible transgressions” in order to “maintain their (racist/ial) homogeneities” (Goldberg 5). Precisely because of this, the 6+5 policy can be read as a conscription contract, mobilizing the national peoplehood in an effort to consolidate national identity as prescribed by FIFA. Yet ironically, this policy-provoked militarization also threatens to expose the fragility and fallibility of the “ethnic singularity” of the national peoplehood. Consider, for example, Italian international Simone Perrotta. Perrotta was born in England, but because of his Italian parentage, he is nevertheless considered an “eligible” Italian under 6+5 regulation<sup>26</sup> (Soccernet staff, *EU and FIFA clash*). Thus, while his eligibility to play for the Italian national team – and arguably his physical appearance, which allows him to pass under the gaze of the white-normative national peoplehood – denotes his *Italianess*, his place of birth problematizes his “nativeness.”

Beyond the implicit effects of the 6+5 policy on the notion of a national peoplehood, it is also imperative to consider the explicit limitations and discriminations it imposes on the players. Under FIFA guidelines, by electing to play for the Italian national team, Simone Perrotta nullifies his eligibility to play for England at an international level. As such, the 6+5 policy would brand him as

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<sup>26</sup> There is an emerging trend of parentage trumping birthright in this discussion of Italian football. And though it certainly warrants further consideration, given the scope of this paper, the complexities of this trend will need to be addressed in a separate endeavour.

a “foreign player” (Soccernet staff, *EU and FIFA clash*) in his country of birth. At top level football, the decision of national team affiliation is ultimately a matter of autonomous choice – underscoring a certain degree of agency and power on the part of players to define and express their own sense of identity. FIFA’s 6+5 policy, however, would effectively load this choice with risks and consequences concerning a player’s professional career. The 6+5 rule operates as a sort of quota system,<sup>27</sup> insisting that a minimum of six starting players be eligible for the national squad. This condition bares “the mark of racist expression,” as it limits, if not immobilizes, a player’s employability outside of his nation of eligibility, thus “exclud[ing] [him] from elevation into the realm of protection, privilege [and] profit [based on] racial difference” (Goldberg 5). Even in a circumstance such as Perrotta’s, racial exclusion would be imposed due to his multi-ethnic identity.

The European Union has “dismissed [the 6+5 rule] as illegal,” arguing that it “is based on direct discrimination on the grounds of nationality... [and] if enforced would amount to discrimination in the workplace and a restriction on the free movement of workers” (Soccernet staff, *EU and FIFA clash*). Ironically – and perhaps sadly given the seemingly amnesiac return – similar accusations were levied against the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) in 1995 by Belgian player Jean-Marc Bosman. In what is now famously known in the

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<sup>27</sup> This terminology has been vehemently refuted by FIFA in an attempt to distance the proposed 6+5 policy from illegalities in the UEFA constitution that were exposed and overturned by the 1995 Bosman case (which will be discussed momentarily).

footballing world as the Bosman case, Jean-Marc Bosman successfully challenged the legality of UEFA's "quota system," which "limited the number of foreign players"<sup>28</sup> [that] could play in a particular match" (Pearson para 1). Bosman argued that as a European citizen, he had the right to "freedom of movement" within the European Union to seek out employment (then Article 48 of the Treaty of Rome - now Art. 39 of the EU Treaty), and that the quota system prevented him from exercising this right (para 3).

Unlike the state of football before the Bosman ruling, FIFA's 6+5 policy will not limit the number of foreign players a club is allowed to sign and register. Furthermore, there will be no limitations on substitutes, which effectively means that a game could end 3+8 in favor of foreign players (Soccernet staff, *EU and FIFA clash*). It is through these legal technicalities that FIFA intends to evade EU discrimination laws. Yet, despite this ambivalent legal safeguarding, an undercurrent of exclusion and restriction persists. Even if all three substitutes were foreign players, that would still limit clubs to eight foreign players per game. As such, investing in a reservoir of foreign players would prove a wasteful use of resources for clubs – who operate on profit-driven platforms – and therefore close off opportunities for many foreign players. Investing in such reservoirs would also be constrained by the economic capabilities of respective clubs, which would also

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<sup>28</sup> 3 foreign players + 2 'assimilated' foreign players – assimilated players must have played in the country of the relevant national association for an uninterrupted period of 5 years, including 3 years as a junior (Van den Bogaert 329).

limit, if not restrict, employment opportunities for foreign players. Although both exclusionary circumstances emerge directly from regulations imposed by the 6+5 policy, the restrictions on and exclusion of players would be imposed by market forces, enabling FIFA to extricate itself from the discriminatory liabilities of the policy. The inherent (if implicit) racism of the policy, then, becomes difficult to challenge or undo, for without a tangible link or label, racialized logic can easily be denied and diffused.

FIFA president Sepp Blatter, as the voice of FIFA, takes full advantage of this disconnect to champion himself as a crusader of fairness and equality in football. Speaking at a press conference in May 2008, Blatter declared that the purpose of the 6+5 policy is to “prevent leagues having only a small number of clubs with any chance of winning the title” (FIFA.com, *Negotiations key*). Yet, as Dale Johnson makes clear, the unequal distribution of wealth within respective national leagues would inevitably see the more affluent clubs simply buy up the best local talent, leaving the rest with “the scraps” (*the flaws of 6+5*) – creating an inequitable dynamic not far removed from the one currently in place. The principles of the 6+5 policy essentially fail to account for the economic hierarchies of football’s league structures. Thus, even should a *national* or *racial* balance be achieved, divisions and inequalities between clubs will invariably continue and the ethical doctrine FIFA presumes to uphold through the 6+5 policy will be undercut.



This is not to say, though, that the unregulated market of the post-Bosman era provides an ideal or equitable state of affairs. Although the Bosman ruling only affects EU nations – only 18 of FIFA’s (then) 193 members – it nevertheless affects the most affluent of FIFA’s member nations. An unregulated transfer market and the deep pockets of European clubs have drastically altered the complexion of European football. The unregulated player market has also affected non-European leagues – especially in Africa and South America – as their players gravitate towards the higher wages offered by European clubs. The motivations for movement, here, illustrate the historical inequalities being legitimized by football’s free market. European clubs are now able to exploit the unequal distribution of resources between the global North and South in order to buy (discounted) players from Southern nations. Discussing this situation, Roger Blanpain<sup>29</sup> argues that “Africa is ripe [for exploitation], because Africa is poor, soccer is glory, and soccer is money” (qtd. in Van Zeller, *Soccer’s Lost Boys*). Blanpain’s argument effectively highlights the vulnerability of poor players in Africa – as well as other Southern footballing nations – who are easily manipulated by the affluence and allure of European clubs.<sup>30</sup> Unquestionably,

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<sup>29</sup> Professor of Labour law at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium and founder of FIFPRO (the International Labour Union of Soccer Players)

<sup>30</sup> This issue will be explored more thoroughly in the following chapter. In particular, the discussion will examine the ways in which policies like the 6+5 and its English Premier League offshoot, the home-grown policy, threaten to exacerbate these vulnerabilities and inequalities rather than remedy them.

then, regulations need to be put in place to protect players from this systemic failure. The 6+5 policy, though, does not appear to be the answer – for it does little to address or rectify the inequitable structure currently in place. Admittedly, the 6+5 policy does take steps to keep players in their native nations. But it does so by excluding them from leagues where they might achieve their full human and sporting potential, as well as attain comparable compensation to their European counterparts.

Similar to the ways in which the 6+5 policy fails to remedy economic inequalities within leagues, it further fails to resolve economic inequalities across leagues and/or nations. As Blanpain makes clear, the desire of African players to move to Europe is (almost wholly) motivated by financial concerns. But this financial desire extends beyond wages and wealth. Players (and clubs) in Southern nations lack the resources and infrastructure available in Europe. This effectively closes off opportunities for both personal and league progression. In order to create an equitable dynamic in world football, FIFA needs to do more than simply force players to remain in their home nation (one of the underlying ideas of the 6+5 policy). Instead, there needs to be incentives to stay – such as equitable resources, infrastructure, wages, exposure etc. In other words, there needs to be a massive structural change in football if a global balance is to be achieved. And given that FIFA invests a large percentage of its profits in

“development initiatives... and countless other humanitarian projects” (Grondona, qtd. in Blatter et al. 9), this massive structural change does not seem unrealistic.

Rather than concealing systemic failures with racialized policies that mainly concern the state of European football, FIFA might consider investing in the structural development of Southern leagues and clubs.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, given FIFA’s diverse media and marketing affiliations, it proves in a prime position to broker broadcasting deals for less visible and less affluent clubs in lesser known footballing nations. This would not only generate exposure for a diverse array of football leagues (and players), but also generate an economic influx that has already proven lucrative for FIFA and certain European leagues.<sup>32</sup> This would help create financial sustainability within and across leagues, and moreover, lessen the current competitive handicap facing many Southern football nations and clubs.

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<sup>31</sup> Granted, this would spark criticism concerning inequitable or preferential treatment from affluent European clubs. Nevertheless, if competitive equality is genuinely FIFA’s objective, then structural and economic imbalances need to be addressed.

<sup>32</sup> FIFA’s self-serving use of such media and marketing connections and the 6+5 policy’s role in maintaining such self-serving ambitions will be discussed later in this chapter.

*If you're attacking, you don't get as tired as when you're chasing.*

*~Kyle Rote, Jr.*

The 6+5 policy can also be interpreted as FIFA's attempt to re-assert its position of power on the global stage. The Bosman case dealt a significant blow to the prestige of the organization. As John Sugden and Alan Tomlinson suggest, the legal loss and structural shift catalyzed by the Bosman case "revealed the fragility of FIFA's claim to be above national and international law" (*Contest* 51). While the post-Bosman face of football certainly supports this claim, as well as evidences a European dominion that rivals FIFA's global authority, FIFA's international authority and legal elusiveness might not be as fragile as presumed. The 6+5 policy has the backing of 155 of FIFA's 208 member nations (Soccernet staff, *EU and FIFA clash*). Not only does this illustrate substantial collective support for a policy that can be described as legally and ethically questionable at best, but also, it highlights the expansive international representation of the organization. Also, the fact that FIFA operates on a "one vote per nation rule" has meant that "as Third World membership of FIFA has expanded, their political influence has grown concomitantly" (*Contest* 226).

By giving a voice to more nations than the UN,<sup>33</sup> FIFA has become a prominent political force in the global community – so much so, that "[o]ther than

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<sup>33</sup> FIFA: 208; UN: 192.

being admitted as a member of the United Nations, membership of FIFA... is the clearest signal that a country's status as nation state has been recognized by the international community" (*Contest* 9). Although there is a certain degree of football hype at work in this statement, the international recognition that comes from being affiliated with such a notable global organization, as well as the visibility that nations receive through participating in FIFA tournaments – such as the World Cup – nevertheless provides significant political leverage for nations seeking admission into other global institutions (ex. WTO, UN, IMF). Inasmuch, FIFA possesses the political influence necessary to challenge and potentially supersede national and international laws – for, as Blatter notes, "[i]f there is the political will a law can be amended, a law can be interpreted, all laws can be changed or amended" (ESPNsoccernet, *FIFA hold fire*).

FIFA approaches race, ethnicity and equality with the same mentality that it does the law. Based on findings by the Institute for European Affairs (INEA) – hired by FIFA to analyze the (il)legalities of the 6+5 policy – FIFA maintains a position that "at worst, the 6+5 rule could constitute 'indirect discrimination' because 'it is not directly based on the nationality of professional players.. [but rather] '[their] entitlement to play for a national team'" (Soccernet staff, *EU and FIFA clash*). Muddled amid this rationalizing and quantifying of discrimination is an explicit articulation of FIFA's witting engagement in discriminatory practices. Given the overarching international/institutional support for the 6+5 policy, and

the ways in which the policy intensifies both nationality and nationalism, FIFA's actions constitutes what MacPherson conceptualizes as "institutional racism": "[t]he collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin" (qtd. in Wight 711). Granted, issues of "colour," "culture" and "ethnic origin" are far more complex and difficult to pin down – especially considering FIFA's slippery distinctions between "nationality" and "eligibility" – than MacPherson's broad treatment of the terms. Nevertheless, the exclusionary principles underpinning the 6+5 policy make the nature of FIFA's institutional character quite clear.

FIFA's discriminatory nature is further embellished by the fact that the 6+5 policy proves merely a medium through which FIFA can establish and assert its global authority. In a revealing response to the EU's contestation of the 6+5 policy, Blatter declared that "the objective is not 6+5... [t]he autonomy of sport, this is the objective" (Blatter, qtd. in Reuters, *FIFA Presses Ahead*). This bold statement shows FIFA striving for what Goldberg describes as "Schmittian sovereignty". Goldberg writes,

Carl Schmitt famously declared the sovereign to be he who decides the exception... A sovereign will be clearly identified, he says, where his act 'is not hampered in some way by [constitutional] checks and balances,' this placing him 'outside the normally valid legal system.' (319)

Beyond its already limited accountability as an International Non-Governmental Association (INGO), FIFA seems set on extending its authority “outside the normally valid legal system,” regardless of the sacrifices that must be made to both the national identities of its players and its fans. In short, the ethnoracial exclusion embedded in the 6+5 policy proves a medium through which to argue and establish its hegemonic authority. Race, under these circumstances, is emptied of its historical and socio-political meaning, and reduced to a mere plot-point in a political plan. In other words, by exploiting race to push forward a political agenda, FIFA fails to acknowledge or address both the historical and contemporary injustices tied to race, thereby devaluing their significance. Ultimately, this failed recognition serves to preserve and legitimize pre-existing ethnoracial hierarchies and inequalities.

*Why is there only one ball for 22 players? If you gave a ball to each of them, they'd stop fighting for it. ~Author Unknown*

FIFA's drive towards hegemonic autonomy, however, is complicated by its reliance on, and responsibilities to, other corporate entities who feed FIFA financially, thus fuelling the institution's economic growth, power and prosperity. As of 2000, FIFA's business was estimated to be worth more than \$250 billion dollars a year (Tomlinson 63) – a figure that grows exponentially every year

(Smart 18).<sup>34</sup> With a global audience quite literally in the billions,<sup>35</sup> the FIFA World Cup is any advertiser's dream; and as FIFA's staggering revenue stream suggests, there is no shortage of corporate sponsors queuing up to invest in such an incomparable opportunity. Yet, following Pat Day's argument, as the revenue generated through commercial partner increases, so too does the demands of those partners (76). Through investment – and in order to protect and maximize investment – corporate entities tacitly gain a large voice in the operation and identity of both FIFA and football. Put simply, corporate sponsors are not simply buying advertising space; they are buying a stake in the game itself.

Underscoring FIFA's corporate interdependence, president Sepp Blatter emphasizes that “[w]hat is important is a partnership between soccer, the economy and television which benefits all sides” (qtd. in Smart 7). In partnering with neoliberal entities – and ideologies – FIFA's current and potential autonomy proves problematic. More importantly, however, this profit-driven partnership brings up questions of who falls under Blatter's ambiguous referent “soccer,” and how “soccer” actually benefits. Franklin Foer identifies soccer's/football's partnership with television as the vehicle by which football transcends numerous boundaries and borders, connecting the lives of half the world's population (2).

Despite this transcendent connectivity, however, racial prejudice still pervades the

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<sup>34</sup> In 2010, FIFA expects to make US\$3.34 billion from its World Cup television broadcasting deals alone (Soccernet Staff, *film slams preparations*).

<sup>35</sup> The 2006 World Cup final garnered an audience of roughly 3 billion people (Goldblatt x).



game. Sugden and Tomlinson further suggest that the World Cup spurs economic development in host nations, as it “‘delivers a rationale for revitalising the communication and civic infrastructures of primary sites’” (qtd. in Butler 43-4).<sup>36</sup> Yet, many footballing nations are still without adequate facilities or development programs.<sup>37</sup> As such, Blatter’s understanding of “benefit” seems grounded in neoliberal terms – where, as Chris Holden points out, “extreme inequalities are an acceptable outcome of increased capital growth” (104) – and his interpretation of “soccer,” in fact, means soccer’s governing body.

This exploitation of the game for profit reinforces FIFA’s self-serving character. Sugden and Tomlinson write that “power, nationalism and money are the three engines of FIFA’s socio-political persona” (*Contest* 4). When critically considering both the origins and the objectives of the 6+5 policy, it becomes apparent that nationality functions for FIFA as the gateway to power and profitability. The World Cup tournament – FIFA’s golden child – is structured on the basis of competing nations. As such, both FIFA and its corporate partners have a vested interest in the maintenance and protection of the nationalist structure of the game so as to ensure profitable returns. The 6+5 policy, then, can

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<sup>36</sup> Both Soccernet Staff’s *film slams preparations for 2010* and Oliver Butler’s *Getting the Games* offer excellent examples of the potentially deleterious effects of infrastructural investments by host nations. Ultimately, this underscores the sad reality of the precarious positions states are willing to inhabit in order to “partner” with FIFA.

<sup>37</sup> See Soccernet Staff, *Film slams preparations for 2010*, Oliver Butler’s *Getting the Games*, or Barry Smart’s *Not Playing Around* for further elaboration.

be viewed as a means to retrench hypernationalistic sentiments in the collective consciousness, and eliminate hybridized identities which threaten FIFA's competitive structure.

As the most popular and the most lucrative sporting event on the planet, it is hardly surprising that the opportunity to host the FIFA World Cup is as sought after by nations as the television rights are by broadcasters. Beyond the financial appeal of the tournament, however, the right to host also proves attractive for myriad social, cultural, and political reasons. For instance, the World Cup has long been viewed as a means for Southern nations to gain a voice and assert their presence on the world stage. As Sugden and Tomlinson note, “[t]he early prominence of Uruguay, and the emergent strengths of Argentina and Brazil, ensured the central role of South America in the world of football politics” (*Contest* 21). As well, it earned Uruguay the distinction of hosting the first World Cup tournament in 1930. The significance of this novel moment, as well as the significance of these emerging footballing powers was initially overlooked by the Eurocentric football body politic. In fact, the decision to award Uruguay with the tournament was driven mainly by “indifference from most European footballing powers” (*Contest* 23). However, the sustained popularity and success of these South American teams in the first, and subsequent tournaments, eventually signaled a threat against the European – mainly British – hegemony over the game.

Ironically, the Europeans' oversight in the early part of the twentieth century catalyzed the dismantling of their football hegemony. Over the course of the twentieth century, FIFA continued to expand, and South America continued to triumph.<sup>38</sup> Then, in 1974, Brazilian João Havelange ousted Sir Stanley Rous as FIFA president, becoming the first – and to this day, the only – non-European to occupy the position. In the meteoric 24 year reign that followed, Havelange pursued his promise to expand the organization and increase the number of countries participating in both FIFA and the World Cup. With the mobilization of African and Asian nations, FIFA under Havelange embodied “a wider political struggle through which the non-aligned or ‘Third World’ sought to have an impact on international affairs with the ultimate objective being to ‘eliminate the widening gap between developed and developing countries’” (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 225). The expanding institutional population and collective potential of emerging nations enabled by Havelange's rule presented FIFA as a site of empowerment, and significantly diminished the Eurocentric dominance of the organization.

While Havelange's endeavor to prop up emerging and developing nations certainly sounds noble, his reign can hardly be characterized as an altruistic quest to empower the global South. In actual fact, Havelange's endeavors were

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<sup>38</sup> By 1974, a South American team had won the World Cup 5 – of a possible 10 – times.

exploitative and self-serving, reflecting the nature of the organization under his control. Butler writes,

FIFA was formally a democratic institution accountable to its members and congress, but Havelange had, since his election, run FIFA as his own personal fiefdom. With the FIFA General Secretary, Sepp Blatter, alongside running football's 'civic service', Havelange was able to control FIFA through a combination of patronage and fear, allocating positions on committees to his supporters. While FIFA officially worked for the 'good of the game', as its power spread, it began to serve the aspirations of its own members rather than the objectives for which it was established. (47)

As Butler makes clear, Havelange's management and maneuvering reflected his intent to undermine the democratic fundamentals of the organization and entrench a new hegemonic structure of power. Havelange was also notorious for his audacious and ostentatious misuse of FIFA funds (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 40), not to mention allegations of embezzlement and "other murky business practices" (Tomlinson 66). Even his enlistment of "the non-aligned or 'Third World'" proved less an effort to "eliminate the widening gap between developed and developing countries," than to secure a more comprehensive support base for his presidency (Sugden and Tomlinson, *International Power Struggles* 59).

Perhaps the greatest prerogative for Havelange's solicitation of Southern nations – a prerogative that remains an integral part of FIFA's agenda today – was the recognition of economic potential in regions where the game – and more importantly, a market for the game – showed lucrative promise. Put simply, the underlying principle of FIFA's international expansion was to seize upon an untapped market. Given FIFA's neoliberal agenda and affiliations, the emerging global presence of new footballing nations<sup>39</sup> proves an ideal opportunity to expand the market and stimulate economic growth. As these nations gain a global presence, they also gain the desire<sup>40</sup> to validate that presence, to prove themselves a legitimate "part of the capable and developed 'global village'" (Zhangazha). For FIFA, this desire registers as a vulnerable moment, replete with economic promise: it becomes a marketing strategy of sorts, creating demand for a product that will supposedly ingratiate and integrate emerging nations with the global North. And given that FIFA controls this product, it inevitably proves the beneficiary of this demand.

Despite Havelanges' altruistic posturing and promises of empowering opportunities, his manipulative maneuverings did not always go unseen.

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<sup>39</sup> Most notably, nations from Africa and Asia. Although Egypt played in the 1934 World Cup (the first appearance of an African nation at the tournament), Africa was not represented again until 1970 (Morocco). Similarly, the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) participated in the 1938 World Cup, but Asia was not represented again until 1966 (Korea DPR).

<sup>40</sup> Again, this desire must be considered as both nationally fractured and nationally fracturing – but existent nonetheless.

Havelange's corrupt allocation of positions within the institution sparked animosity among excluded nations. Ironically, nations in the global South – most notably African nations – took an adamant stance against Havelange's corrupt system (and arguably, their exclusion from this system), thus challenging a structure of power that they, themselves, played a crucial role in creating. This fractured alliance – along with Africa's economic dependence on European clubs (Butler 48)<sup>41</sup> – worked significantly in Europe's favor, as they sought to repair and retrench their hegemonic influence over the world of football. The Europeans felt that their interests had been dramatically compromised by the progress of emergent nations in FIFA – a questionable stance given that "Europe generates almost 80 per cent of the game's global turnover" (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 226), and that eight of the top ten spots on the FIFA/Coca-Cola World Ranking are currently occupied by Western European nations.<sup>42</sup> Regardless, European football's financial strength and perceived depreciating position resulted in them threatening secession from FIFA – a move that would leave FIFA financially struggling to survive (*Contest* 226).

This mutinous tension eventually boiled over into the decision process which awarded the 2002 World Cup to the joint bid of Korea and Japan. As both

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<sup>41</sup> "Europe has become a major source of income for Africa with the transfers of many African footballers to European clubs" (Butler 48). A similar argument can also be made for South American nations.

<sup>42</sup> At the time of writing – March 2010 (Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Portugal, France, England, Greece). <<http://www.fifa.com/worldfootball/ranking/>>

the first time two nations would co-host the finals and the first time the finals would be held outside of Europe and the Americas, this proved a novel moment in FIFA and World Cup history, as well as “an unprecedented boost to Asian football” (Sugden and Tomlinson, *International Power Struggles* 59). For Japan, the World Cup promised to increase the popularity of the game in the country, and inject interest and financial influx into the still budding J. League.<sup>43</sup>

Correspondingly, the Japanese also saw the World Cup as a way “to promote new patterns of sport and leisure involvement in Japan as economic growth... had declined relatively” (Butler 44). Japan essentially hoped to revitalize its waning economy by re-packaging football as a consumable, and thus profitable, product. For South Korea, the World Cup bid was driven largely by intra-regional competition with Japan – it became “‘a mean [sic] of resistance to Japanese rule’ during [and following] the occupation” (Lee, qtd. in Butler 44).<sup>44</sup> A successful World Cup campaign would offer Korea the chance to assert dominance over its former oppressor, and do so while the whole world watched. Unsurprisingly, this rivalry incited reluctance from both parties to co-host the tournament. This reluctance, however, mattered little to FIFA and UEFA, who had stakes of their own in the outcome of the bid.

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<sup>43</sup> Japan’s professional football league – established in 1993.

<sup>44</sup> The travesties and complexities of this occupation, while relevant to the motivations behind Korea’s World Cup bid, cannot be adequately discussed given the scope of this paper. See Butler’s *Getting the Games*, for a comprehensive discussion.

The Japan and Korea World Cup campaigns became the medium through which Europe (under the banner of UEFA) asserted its political and economic leverage against Havelange. The latter was an active supporter of the Japanese bid. A vote for Korea, then, implicitly entailed a vote against Havelange. This led to the European footballing powers forging an alliance with Chung Moon-Joon – head of the Korean bid and member of the FIFA executive committee – in order for both parties to consolidate their efforts and further their respective ends (Butler 47). Korea, however, believing the costs to be excessive, failed to put in place the necessary resources and infrastructure to host the tournament independently, thus priming the prospect of a joint bid. Japan, realizing the mutinous undercurrent against its campaign, and desiring to preserve the structural and economic implications of hosting the World Cup, reluctantly submitted to the possibility of a joint bid. Although with extreme reservations, both Japan and Korea ultimately conceded to a joint bid, realizing that “if [they] were to share the World Cup hosting it would still deal a blow to Havelange’s prestige [but] without [either nation] suffering a great defeat” (Butler 49).

While hardly a departure from FIFA’s multinational-capital modus operandi, this moment in football history provides an ideal example of FIFA’s duplicitous mindset. In granting joint custody of the World Cup to Japan and Korea, FIFA allowed capital and consumption to move freely across national borders – a situation which is ironically juxtaposed against the restrictions on



player movement enforced by the 6+5 policy. Inasmuch, FIFA demonstrates a willingness to embrace the transnational mobility of capital in order to further its political position and economic pursuits, while simultaneously rejecting the transnational movement of players which threaten its structure of competition. Thus, while certain positives can be gleaned from FIFA's multinational endeavor, for example, the development of Asian leagues and players, opportunities in football for such players will ironically be constrained by the 6+5 policy's ethnoracial compartmentalization.

Again, this illustrates the need for structural changes to the global game rather than racialized policies that mainly concern the state of European football. League creation or development might be catalyzed by the economic influx and hypervisibility generated by FIFA events such as the World Cup. However, this injection of income and exposure is only temporary, and not adequate to sustain long-term growth. As FIFA's expands its market, it also needs to accept responsibility for its new members, to embrace its paternalistic role – a role it purportedly takes great pride in – in order to ensure the prosperity of such budding leagues. As mentioned earlier, without infrastructure, exposure, competitive wages and other resources, leagues will ultimately falter. Therefore, FIFA must make use of its influential position and resources in order to re-balance the inequitable dynamics between international leagues, and ensure progressive development for all leagues and players.

The decision to award a joint bid to Japan and Korea also marked the beginning of the end of Havelange's reign as FIFA president. In the aftermath of the Japan/Korea debacle, it was tacitly decided within the organization that the installation of a European successor was the most logical means of neutralizing the threat of an UEFA secession from FIFA (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 227). Yet, even as he prepared for retirement in 1998, Havelange, endeavored to ensure the inauguration of "his hand-picked protégé" (Tomlinson 66) – Joseph 'Sepp' Blatter – in an effort to guarantee the continuance of his autocratic legacy. Although – and perhaps notable that – the election was steeped in controversy (67), Blatter triumphed over Lennart Johansson,<sup>45</sup> and captured the FIFA presidency in June 1998. Despite the return of a European to the presidential position, however, Blatter's victory over Johansson – achieved in large part by fracturing the African-European alliance (67) – failed to fully restore a European hegemony within FIFA. In fact, the election curiously divided the European alliance, with the English FA putting their support behind Blatter, rather than Johansson, in an attempt to secure an English seat on the 2006 World Cup voting committee (69).<sup>46</sup> Ultimately, the circumstances surrounding Blatter's campaign, as well as the FIFA electoral process itself, reiterate the self-serving political

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<sup>45</sup> Then president of UEFA.

<sup>46</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, England had an active bid to host the tournament that year.

maneuverings that continue to pervade the organization under the guise of democracy

*The world of sport is often promoted as sanctuary from the world-at-large. It is popularly considered to be a place where competition is conducted 'on a level playing field' ~ Chris Hallinan and Steven Jackson*

Regardless of the European failure to wholly recoup authority over FIFA, Europe's, and especially Britain's, economic and political influence over the institution and the structure of football remains unquestionable:

It is the historical legacy of the British Association's formation of the International Board which has guaranteed them a permanent vice-presidential position on FIFA's executive committee [...] [and further] afford[s] the four UK footballing 'nations' the right to preside over the laws – and therefore the shape and the character – of the game, having four votes to FIFA's four votes. (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 60-1)

As founders of the game, Britain has commandeered a permanent position of authority within FIFA. And with equal voting power to the rest of the world – which further problematizes the democratic structure of the organization – and a three-quarter vote required for an amendment to pass, Britain's historical legacy,

as well as the cultural values embedded in the game seem more than secure. Curiously enough though, this despotic position proves rather unnecessary. Most nations under the FIFA umbrella, even many Southern nations, are in favor of the conservative set-up of the Board, believing that the very limited changes to the game's structure since its inception are a genuine sign that "the board works" (*Contest* 61-2). Beneath the institutional facade of both democracy and minority empowerment, an underlying desire to preserve the traditional structure and complexion of football – which is threatened, ironically, by notions of global mobility, in part, enabled by FIFA's, as well as football's, networks of global connectivity<sup>47</sup> – permeates throughout FIFA.

Liah Greenfeld argues that "nationalist sentiments are almost always linked, directly and indirectly, to a view of the future held by particular groups in society" and that in this regard, "'it would be no over-statement to say that the world in which we live was brought into being by vanity'" (qtd. in Fenton 164). Despite FIFA's constant staging of football as an "outlet for communication... peace and harmony" (internal publication *90 Years of FIFA*, qtd. in Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 7),<sup>48</sup> the self-interested attitude – and influential character – of the institution continues to impose understandings of national identity.

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<sup>47</sup> Consider *90 Years of FIFA*, qtd. in Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 7; Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 17, 21; Annan, qtd. in Smart 6.

<sup>48</sup> An arguably valid position (see Warren St. John, *Outcasts United*), which is nevertheless constantly over-generalized by FIFA's rhetoric of altruism.

Rationalizing the need for the 6+5 policy, President Blatter emphasizes that “coach[es] need an interpreter to communicate with [their] players. Do you think this is football? *I don’t*” (*emphasis added*, ESPNsocccernet, *FIFA hold fire*).

Blatter’s definition of football extends beyond the reduction of foreignness proposed by the 6+5 policy, suggesting instead a complete elimination of difference within clubs. This definition invariably troubles FIFA’s promise of harmony, as it resists the meeting and mingling of otherness and effaces the depiction of football as a sort of universal language. Furthermore, it reiterates FIFA’s desire to (re)construct football as a game that operates within culturally isolated systems.

FIFA’s personality can further be seen to manifest in line with what Zygmunt Bauman describes as “carnivals of charity” (*New Poor* 84). In blatant cases of racism, such as the Balotelli slur, teams are often charged with small fines, or in more serious instances, ordered to play future games behind closed doors (Reuters, *racist chant*). Under Article 58 of the FIFA disciplinary code (FIFA.com, *FIFA Endeavours*), stadium bans and point deductions from offending teams are also considered as appropriate punitive measures. While these reprimands certainly demonstrate an effort to tackle racism in the game, they fail to acknowledge or address the structural concerns that enable, and even encourage racist behaviors. Instead, these reprimands focus solely on the aftermath of an event, expressing “massive but as a rule short-lived explosions of pent-up moral

feeling triggered by lurid sights” (*New Poor* 84). This spontaneous and instantaneous charity functions as a sort of cathartic release, meant to assuage structural tension and “render day-to-day equanimity and moral indifference more bearable” (*New Poor* 84). The transient hypervisibility of a crisis moment effectively diverts attention away from the structural flaws that enabled and allowed such moral depravity in the first place. This, in turn, reinforces an illusory understanding of the structural apparatus as effective and idyllic.

A similar interpretation can be applied to FIFA’s *Annual Anti-Discrimination Day(s)*. FIFA held its first Anti-Discrimination Day on July 7<sup>th</sup> 2002 following a 2001 resolution against discrimination meant to calm public concern over the growing presence of racism in football stadiums. Although FIFA admits that discrimination should be rejected year round (FIFA.com, *anti-discrimination days*), FIFA’s annual anti-discrimination campaign is generally scheduled during a FIFA sanctioned football event – such as the semi-final matches of the 2009 Confederations Cup – in order to “highlight [their] message in front of a global audience of millions” (*anti-discrimination days*). Again, the ethical impulse is laudable, especially since FIFA was one of the first sporting organizations to host such an event. The timing of the occasion, however, seems as much an audacious self-promotion as it does a genuine appeal to the masses. In light of FIFA’s – both explicit and implicit – willingness to discriminate in pursuit of self-interested ends, this annual occasion appears as a tokenistic gesture, a

hypocritical spectacle, a false charity designed only to undergird FIFA's hegemonic position.

*If you are first you are first. If you are second, you are nothing.*

~ *Bill Shankley*

In the introduction to *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Football*, David Goldblatt remarks that “[a]round half the planet watched the 2006 World Cup Final – three billion humans have never done anything simultaneously before” (Goldblatt x). This astonishing feat of connectivity and inclusivity demonstrates the ability of football – as a cultural practice – to transcend race, culture, and geographical space. This staggering exercise in collectivity positions football as a site of infinite potential and possibility, limited only by the ends to which it is put to use. Former FIFA president João Havelange suggests that because football “embraces such a gigantic family,” it has the ability to “creat[e] spontaneous human bonds and reconcile[s] peoples all around the globe” (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 7). In this image, football proves not simply a game, but also a showcase for human potential. And as such, it seems truly deserving of its exalting epithet – *the beautiful game*.

The 6+5 policy, however, problematizes such spontaneous human bonds, permitting connectivity only under highly constructed and constrictive

formulations. In fact, rather than embracing kinship, the policy imposes closed communities. Thus, despite the fact that the FIFA family is gigantic, it is nevertheless, dysfunctional. Time and again, FIFA has exploited its paternalistic role, and even gone so far as to abuse its children, in order to further its own ambitions. Put simply, FIFA prioritizes riches over relatives. Realizing the value of football as a commodity in the wake of technological developments and neoliberal capitalism, FIFA has spent the last half century transforming football into a product fit for consumption. And as an audience of 3 billion viewers suggests, this product has been utterly devoured. Precisely because of this, FIFA has grown into a business worth in excess of \$250 billion a year. But in order to protect this ever-swelling profitability, FIFA demonstrates an incessant need to protect the current commodifiable structure of the game.

FIFA supports its 6+5 vision under the pretence that it will protect national interests and return equality to club level football. Yet, this argument fails to address the complexities of national identities – especially in the context of a globalized world of blurred boundaries, social and cultural mobility, and numerous other intimate and intricate human connections. Furthermore, FIFA's position fails to address the economic inequalities that pervade the game, and perpetuate injustice. Ultimately, the 6+5 policy appears to be FIFA's attempt to cope with and control the instability generated by the global mobility of players. In its attempt to control the nationalist structure of football, FIFA seeks to



preserve its own identity and ambitions, regardless of the impact on the rights and identities of both the players of the game and the nations within the FIFA family. The implications of FIFA's behavior, however, extend beyond the sporting realm. Given the scope of FIFA's international audience, salient parallels can be drawn between institutional racism and fan racism – for, if the political structure of the game proves irresponsible, any efforts to enforce changes in the attitudes and behaviors of the fans seem futile and hypocritical. As the incongruity increases between FIFA's hypernationalistic vision of the world and the lived reality of a globalized world riddled by complex and complicated subjective and national identities, the racial and ethnic tension that breed “predatory identities” seems certain to compound concomitantly.

CHAPTER 3:  
THE ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE'S HOME-GROWN POLICY

This chapter will assess the English Premier League's apparent legislative imitation of the FIFA 6+5 initiative – an imitation that emphasizes the pervasive anxiety and insecurity in English football – as the League struggles to control the effects of global mobility and its waning hegemony over the game. On September 15, 2009, the English Premier League announced “that from next season (2010/2011) every team must name a squad of 25 players, of which eight must be home grown” (premierleague.com, *home-grown quota*). The English Premier League defines “a home grown player” as “any player who has played for an English or Welsh club for three years before their 21st birthday” (premierleague.com, *home-grown quota*). According to the English Premier League, the home-grown policy is meant to prioritize the development of young local players over the importing of foreign players. This will subsequently establish a more evenly balanced sense of competition amongst clubs, as well as help control dramatic spending on player transfers and create a more stable economic environment for both clubs and the league.

Much like FIFA's 6+5 policy, though, the home-grown policy proves overly focused on racial concerns, with little consideration given to the inequitable distribution of wealth between clubs. As such, the ethnoracial

priorities imposed by the policy implicitly encourage exploitive practices such as player poaching and “child trafficking” – the recruitment and relocation of young prospects from other countries – particularly countries in the global South (Soccernet staff, *child trafficking*). The complex and convoluted definitions of English identity that arise from these practices – as a result of institutional recognition under home-grown policy statutes – threatens to unsettle the traditional white normative understanding of English national identity, generating uncertainty within the national peoplehood. According to Arjun Appadurai, this sense of uncertainty breeds anxiety, intolerance and ultimately violence (*Small Numbers*, 6; 11).

The English Premier League’s use of the home-grown policy, this chapter will argue, reproduces an ethnoracially singular understanding of English identity in order to strengthen the “English” presence within both the League and the national squad. By restricting access to resources, infrastructure and competition, the home-grown policy grants developmental advantages to English players, and therefore proves an effective means of retrenching England’s hegemonic position both within the nation and on the global stage. Furthermore, the policy’s clear articulation of inclusion/exclusion concerning British footballing nations serves to exacerbate historical tensions as a means of protecting the hierarchical arrangement of power within the United Kingdom.

*Football is a simple game made complicated by people who should know better. ~ Bill Shankly*

According to English Premier League (EPL) Chief, Richard Scudamore, the home-grown policy is meant to “encourage youth development and the promotion of young players... It's a rule which we think will give clubs an extra incentive to develop players, and to make a better return from their investment in youth... Make, rather than buy, is our intention” (qtd. in Munro, *BBC.co.uk*). Through the implementation of the home-grown policy, the EPL is seemingly attempting to establish a sense of stability and sustainability in the domestic league and the national squad. The desire to ‘make, rather than buy’ is seemingly an institutional effort to curb the audacious and “significant loss-making” spending (Jones,<sup>49</sup> qtd. in Soccernet Staff, *Wages Up*) – in an ever-inflating market<sup>50</sup> – of Premier League clubs, as they struggle to remain not only competitive, but dominant, in the world of football. Moreover, the home-grown policy purportedly aims to invoke a more equitable balance within the league itself – for, richer clubs will not be able to simply import an unlimited supply of top quality players from around the world.

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<sup>49</sup> Director of Deloitte’s Sport Business Group.

<sup>50</sup> “In the five year period from 2003 to 2007, gross transfer spending by Premier League clubs has more than doubled from £248m to over £530m” (Deloitte Sports Business Group).

The equitable potential of the policy, however, has been brought into doubt by many football pundits. Former England captain John Terry argues that the regulations outlined in the home-grown policy are inadequate and ill-conceived, resulting in a policy that will fall short of its intended objectives:

We can all put eight players in a squad of 25 but it doesn't necessarily mean they are going to be in the team so it still poses a problem... Until there is a rule that there has to be (homegrown) players in the starting XI, I don't think much is going to change because you can still have 11 foreign players in the team. I think it is going to be very much the same. (qtd. in Soccernet Staff, *Terry unhappy*)

Without regulations to ensure that “home-grown” players are actually incorporated into the squad, they risk being reduced to a marginal presence – meant to fill a spot in a quota, rather than a spot in the team. Moreover, with quota requirements filled, clubs – especially affluent clubs – are free to import foreign players, who can, according to the regulations of the policy, take precedent and prominence over home-grown players.<sup>51</sup> Leniency in the regulations, thus, undercuts the supposed objectives of the policy, enabling investment in youth development to be circumvented in favor of continued foreign importation.

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<sup>51</sup> At the end of the game, a club could start 11 foreign players, as well as make 3 foreign substitutions, and still have space left in its quota to account for depth of squad (several of which could also be foreigners).

The EPL's aim to achieve a more equitable balance between clubs through the home-grown policy also proves problematic – for, similar to Dale Johnson's critique of FIFA's 6+5 policy, there is nothing to stop more affluent clubs simply buying up all the top quality "home-grown" players, leaving less affluent clubs with nothing but "the scraps" (*the flaws of 6+5*). Although the EPL has tied a "fit and proper person [financial] test" (Soccernet Staff, *home grown quotas*) to the home-grown policy, in an attempt to reduce audacious and unsustainable spending, there nevertheless remains a staggering difference in wealth between Premiership clubs.<sup>52</sup> This inevitably results in a hierarchal arrangement, where certain clubs are advantaged by superior purchasing power and the capacity to offer more lucrative wages. The home-grown policy, then, simply threatens to shift club priorities, placing an emphasis on the purchase of top British players rather than on the importation of players from abroad. And under these circumstances, more affluent clubs will gain the greatest share of a market in limited supply, which effectively undermines the doctrine of equality proposed by the EPL.

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<sup>52</sup> According to the Forbes top 20 richest soccer clubs list, there is a US \$1.468 billion difference in gross club worth between Manchester United (#1 in both the league and the world) and Tottenham Hotspur (5<sup>th</sup> [of 20 teams] in the league and 12<sup>th</sup> in the world) – (Sarmad, *top 20 richest*). According to the Deloitte 2010 Football Money League, there is a €194.3 million difference in total revenue between Manchester United (1<sup>st</sup> in the league and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the world with €327 million for the 2008/09 season) and Tottenham Hotspur (5<sup>th</sup> in the league and 15<sup>th</sup> in the world with €132.7 million for the 2008/09 season) – (Houlihan et al. 2).

The need to fill a quota and still remain competitive also encourages more affluent clubs to poach young prospects from smaller, less affluent clubs.

Examining the problematic implications of the Bosman case (discussed in chapter 2), Pearson suggests that clubs “now need to sign players for longer contracts than before, otherwise they will risk losing their players on free transfers.

Unfortunately smaller clubs cannot afford to sign longer contracts with players (especially young players) who may not fulfill their potential. Therefore, the good players at smaller clubs will usually be able to move to a bigger club on a free transfer” (para 5). The home-grown policy effectively threatens to exacerbate this situation – for it creates a demand without adequate supply. As larger clubs strive to meet quota and maintain competitive standards, the usurpation of players from smaller clubs will only increase – and as Leeds United chairman Ken Bates argues, “smaller clubs... [are being] stripped of their best kids” without “adequate compensat[ion]” (qtd. in Soccernet staff, *Bates Blast*).

In this light, the home-grown policy not only fails to address the unequal power dynamic already in place within the league, but further promises to widen the sporting and financial gap between clubs as smaller teams are robbed of both their players and their “investments.” And because of the “inadequate compensation” needed to replace their lost players, smaller clubs are financially forced to re-invest in young prospects, leaving them once again susceptible to the poaching habits of more affluent clubs. This cycle essentially transforms smaller

clubs into farming operations rather than football clubs – for, they bear the cost and burden of developing young players without reaping any reward or long-term benefit. As such, the balancing force of the home-grown policy proves tenuous. Arguably, the policy might bring some stability to the precarious spending of some English football clubs. But this stability appears to be at the expense of smaller clubs, which effectively troubles the EPL's initiative for equality.

*The rules of soccer are very simple, basically it is this: if it moves, kick it.*

*If it doesn't move, kick it until it does. ~ Phil Woosnam*

Beyond motivating player poaching practices within the domestic league, the home-grown policy also encourages the contentious practice of “child trafficking” (Soccernet staff, *child trafficking*): the recruitment and relocation of young prospects from other countries – particularly those countries in the global South. While Scudamore feels that the introduction of the policy will not push Premier League clubs to enlist young players from abroad, he admits that there are no regulations built into the policy to prevent clubs from recruiting and training foreign teenagers for the three years necessary to be considered home-grown players (Munro, BBC.co.uk). Such soft policy effectively undermines the intentions of the EPL, as it does not hold clubs accountable should they fail to comply. And as sporting institutions, as well as profit-driven corporations, the



priority of Premiership clubs proves focused on maintaining competitive standards and economic growth. Former Liverpool F.C. manager Rafael Benitez argues that,

[home-grown] players tend to play in the lower divisions because they may not be good enough for the very top. Clubs have to bring in the best young players from around the world at a young age to produce the quality (in the academies)... People talk too much about the age of players and where they are from. They forget about quality, the Premier League is the best league in the world because of the quality, not because of where the players come from. (qtd. in Soccernet Staff, *sceptical over quota system*)

Benitez's statement reinforces the argument that the supply of young home-grown talent is not proportionate to the demand created by the EPL's policy – which will entail certain (likely smaller, less affluent) clubs being left with “the scraps.”

Moreover, Benitez's statement underscores the policy imposed push to recruit young players from abroad – a push that effectively undermines the intended investment in local youth underpinning the EPL's policy. Like smaller clubs in England, less affluent clubs worldwide – especially those clubs in the global South who are easily exploitable because of lacking resources (Roger Blanpain, qtd. in Van Zeller, *Soccer's lost boys*) – will be stripped of their most valuable prospects. Ultimately, this creates an inequitable imbalance not only within the

English Premier League itself, but also an inequitable balance across leagues worldwide.

In defense of the practice, Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger argues that the established infrastructure of big clubs offers an unparalleled advantage to young foreign players: “we give them a top level education, we give them a top level scholarship, and we look after them socially” (qtd. in Soccernet staff, *Wenger against ban*). Wenger’s argument essentially posits that Premiership clubs offer young foreign players access to developmental resources both within and beyond the realm of football – resources that would not likely be available to them at home. Given the exceptionally low success rate of young prospects (Van Zeller, *Soccer’s lost boys*), Wenger’s argument certainly has merit – for these young foreign players are given tools to help them progress professionally outside of a footballing sphere. Wenger’s promise of “social care,” however, proves questionable, if not contentious.

In order to qualify for home-grown status, players must be brought into the club at a relatively young age. Removed from their homes and their cultures, they are then immersed in a system designed to “reproduce a white, male, English order” (King 170). As former England coach Steve Bridges asserts, “[t]here are many cultural and language barriers [in club football], and to get the best out of them we need to integrate *them* into *our* style of doing things” (qtd. in King 182, *emphasis added*). Bridges’ statement goes beyond merely expressing potential

difficulties in communication that might arise as a result of a multi-cultural squad. His statement, instead, suggests a hierarchical arrangement of culture and race in English football, with the white male normative identity positioned at the peak. The respective ethnoracial identities of young foreign players are, thus, effectively devalued by the institutional structure – a treatment reminiscent of the colonial impositions and exploitations enacted through football discussed in the Introduction. As such, the promise of “social care” proves problematic – for, it is both limited and limiting, if not all together deprecating and damaging.

This institutionally ingrained “white, male English order” proves all the more problematic given the disposable nature of academy players. Of those enlisted in EPL club academies, only a select few will ever progress to the top level of competition. The rest are simply released from the club, leaving most permanently outcast from the realm of professional football (Van Zeller, *Soccer’s lost boys*). And while this unfortunate fate is suffered by both foreign and “white” English-born prospects alike, the global expansion of football (discussed in chapter 2) – which has resulted in virtually unrestrained access to players – along with the intensified demand created by the home-grown policy, promises to increase the population of disenfranchised foreign youth – for, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, globalization is “currently [the] most prolific and least controlled, ‘production line’ of human waste or wasted humans” (*New Poor* 93). The emergence of football in the global South has effectively expanded the pool of

potential prospects, while simultaneously reducing the cost of young players due to the comparatively weaker economic position of Southern clubs, as well as the impoverishment of many of the players.<sup>53</sup> As such, the risk assumed by EPL clubs is minimized, enabling them to blithely import a larger number of young foreign players, and consequently, discard a larger number of players who are deemed unfit and no longer valuable.

The home-grown policy, thus, fails to reduce the importing of foreign players into the league; instead, it merely shifts the age at which they are imported, arguably creating a more precarious situation given the vulnerability of young players/persons. Moreover, this policy-incited need to increasingly invest in disposable, young foreign players reinforces historical racial hierarchies through the sustained exploitation of persons from the global South. However, economics now proves the key determinant in dividing ethnoracial categories. Howard Winant suggests that through economic divisions in the global North and South, “white supremacy” – the ideology that drives English football institutions (discussed in both chapters 1 and 2) – is “capable of... repackaging itself as ‘color-blind,’ nonracialist, and meritocratic” (xiii-xiv). This proves exceptionally advantageous for EPL clubs, who can justify the unfortunate consequences of this exploitative practice through an idiom of meritocracy – an understanding of solely

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<sup>53</sup> See *Soccer's lost boys*, nar. Mariana Van Veller, for an in-depth examination of this phenomenon.

individual, rather than institutional failure. As such, the home-grown policy contributes to the preservation of historical hierarchies and inequalities; however, because of the meritocratic veneer beneath which it operates, is able to carry on with little, if any, interruption or contestation, for it appears both an equitable and a charitable practice.

The practice of child trafficking also threatens to unsettle traditional understandings of English national identity, which in turn, threatens to exaggerate racial intolerance within the nation. As noted in chapter 1, England's national identity and sense of future remains indelibly anchored to notions of history and legacy. Yet, by attaching an "English" label to foreign players who have satisfied the criteria of the home-grown policy, the EPL is effectively – albeit unintentionally, given the policy's locally-focused objectives – creating new categories of English identity. These new identities complicate the boundaries of belonging and create profound "uncertainty... about whether a particular person really is what he or she claims or appears to be or has historically been" (Appadurai, *Small Numbers*, 6). Appadurai argues that such uncertainty breeds both suspicion and anxiety regarding "who exactly are among the 'we' and who are among the 'they'" (5) – an anxiety which can only be relieved through the elimination of difference (11). In this instance, however, difference is not necessarily inscribed on the skin, and thus can pass under the white normative gaze of the national peoplehood. The task of identification, thus, proves all the

more frustrating, heightening the risk of violence and anger as the national peoplehood attempt to restore certainty, security and its illusive understanding of national purity.

*To be a footballer means being a privileged interpreter of the feelings and dreams of thousands of people. ~ Cesar Luis Menotti*

Perhaps the most crucial component of the home-grown policy is its stringent focus on the sustainable production of “English” football players. Underlining the main objective of the policy, Scudamore asserts that the institutionally enforced investment in youth will result in a larger congregation of top quality English players available for selection to the national team (premierleague.com, *home-grown quota*). Despite the fact that the parameters of the policy largely fail to account for the self-serving initiatives of EPL clubs – which leads to questionable practices such as child trafficking – the home-grown policy, nevertheless, is designed to provide a platform for the future of English football. By directing resources to the nurturing of English prospects, rather than counter-productively investing in the development and progression of players from England’s international opponents<sup>54</sup> - by facilitating competitive experience

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<sup>54</sup> This argument found particular resonance in the wake of several poor performances by European countries during the group stage of the 2010 FIFA World Cup: “If you look at this World Cup you’ll realize that all the big European teams – awash with money from lucrative

for foreign players/international rivals in one of the highest-caliber leagues in the world – the home-grown policy promises to repair and restore England’s faltering dominance in the world of football.

Echoing the need to rescue the future of English football, Blackburn Rovers manager Sam Allardyce insists that without institutional intervention to “increase the number of domestic participants in the Premier League... the English national side will suffer from a lack of talent... [and] face a ‘very bleak’ future” (qtd. in Soccernet Staff, *dire warning*). Underlying Allardyce’s statement is genuine concern regarding the extinction of not only England’s football presence, but also England’s football identity. Both Allardyce and the EPL – through the home-grown policy – imply a threat to the English game which is directly linked to the insurgence of foreign players. Their respective refusals to recognize new and/or malleable understandings of “English” identity<sup>55</sup> demonstrate a static interpretation of English national identity. In other words, foreigners – in the broadest sense of the word – are seen by the English football establishment as having no role to play in the future of English football, regardless of the talent or promise they might hold. This mentality situates the institutional efforts to

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broadcast contracts... [who] have fail[ed] to develop young players good enough for international soccer – are having problems... Between Spain, France, England, Germany and Italy, we’ve only managed one win. Apart from the Netherlands, only Central and South American teams are smiling” (Italian Soccer Federation President Giancarlo Abete, qtd. in Associated Press, *Big clubs fail*).

<sup>55</sup> Consider, for example, those resulting from the global mobility of players (ex. Manuel Almunia discussed in chapter 1).

preserve the future of English football amid fears over the erosion of a traditional, ethnoracially singular understanding of English identity.

The root of this fear is seemingly grounded in insecurities regarding the (in)stability of historical power dynamics between race and class – for, as Steve Fenton argues, “insecurities [triggered by an intrusive foreign presence] prompt a fear of downward social mobility” (168). While the EPL is still considered one of, if not the, most preeminent leagues in the world, the recent dominance and reputation of EPL teams has been largely attributed to the involvement of foreign players. For many English fans, the mere presence of foreignness in a game that was once (believed to be)<sup>56</sup> purely English proves a signifier of decline (Kassimeris 56). However, the credit currently being given to foreign players for the success of English clubs undermines the local and global accomplishments of an English league and publicly highlights the loss of English dominance over a game that it both invented and globally controlled. This loss of stature not only proves damaging to the prestige of the nation, but also signals a sense of decline in the hierarchical arrangement of race within the nation. As such, the historically dominant white normative national identity perceives itself to be “in danger of trading places,” of being “turned into a minority [itself] unless another minority

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<sup>56</sup> Arthur Wharton, the first black player in England, played football for Darlington as early as 1889 (Kassimeris 56) – only one year after the formation of the English Premier League’s predecessor, The Football League, in 1888.



disappears” (Appadurai, *Small Numbers* 52); and for Appadurai, this is the moment when predatory identities arise and are mobilized (52).

Given the home-grown policy’s aim of alienating otherness and protecting against the “trading of places” through a singularly focused investment in English youth, the EPL can be viewed as seeking to re-establish and secure the ethnoracial arrangement of power within the national sphere. Similar to the constraints of FIFA’s 6+5 policy, the EPL’s home-grown policy hinders the mobility of players, thereby limiting his employability and effectively “exclud[ing] [him] from elevation into the realm of protection, privilege [and] profit [based on] racial difference” (Goldberg 5). Such exclusion serves not only to devalue foreign players, but also, it functions as an institutional measure to limit foreign intrusion<sup>57</sup> in both the domestic league and the national squad. This reduced foreign presence, in turn, creates a favorable environment in which to reproduce Englishness and through reiteration to the public, by means of on-pitch representation (Hobsbawm, qtd. in Alabarces 548), repair the damage done to the ethnoracially singular national idea noted in chapter 1.

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<sup>57</sup> As shown in chapter 1, foreign intrusion is perceived by the English national peoplehood as a taint to the purity of the national ethnos.

*Football has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence: in other words it is war minus the shooting.*

*~ George Orwell*

The EPL's home-grown policy is also designed to maintain the hierarchical landscape of Great Britain. The definition of a home-grown player states that a player must have played for an English or Welsh club for three years before their 21st birthday" (premierleague.com, *home-grown quota*). As such, one must consider the subtle, but clear articulation of inclusion and exclusion concerning British nations – an articulation which problematizes notions of unity within the United Kingdom. Christos Kassimeris rightly points out that "a football team representing Britain as a whole would be far stronger than England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales' national team, yet, due to nationalist aspirations, they appear divided and thus, considerably weaker at international level" (40). Kassimeris' statement highlights the residual tension left lingering from Britain's colonial past – tension which underpins a willingness by all parties to sacrifice sporting success in global football in order to preserve respective national identities. This creates an identity paradox of sorts, where one can be English, Irish (from Northern Ireland), Scottish or Welsh and, at the same time be

British, yet in football, one's identity must remain ethnically singular and fervently divided (Kassimeris 40).

This paradox ultimately generates hostility among the British nations and mobilizes regressive forms of exclusion and intolerance. Following England's World Cup victory over West Germany in 1966 – arguably the pinnacle moment in English football history – the *Glasgow Herald* “printed a picture of the West German team on its front page as they were given a heroes’ welcome on their return to Frankfurt” (Mason 92). Through a rhetorically framed alignment with the West Germans, this Scottish news story effectively illustrates their disdainful sentiments towards England. Despite their loss, the West Germans are put at the forefront of Scottish consciousness and, much like in Frankfurt, glorified as “heroes.” This curious allegiance, along with the complete lack of media recognition serves to subversively undermine England's accomplishment – for it is rendered utterly absent, as if to emphasize its insignificance even in the midst of such a monumental occasion in football history and international sport.

This divisive and derogatory hyper-nationalist mentality has more recently fuelled football supporter movements such as ABE – Anyone But England. The run up to the 2010 World Cup saw a massive group of football supporters from the U.K.'s Celtic nations capture headlines with claims that they would be supporting ABE throughout the tournament (Kelly, *BBC News Magazine*). This movement gained even greater momentum – and controversy – through the

production and sale of ABE shirts, which, much like the millions of fans who don a replica jersey of their respective team, allowed supporters to publicly display their allegiance – or rather lack of allegiance. The ABE movement inevitably sparked an inflamed response from the English, who denounced the slogan as “racist” (Kelly, *BBC News Magazine*). Ironically, however, such antagonistic and politically charged movements are equally prominent in English football. Mapping out the political history of British football, John Kelly remarks that “it seems little coincidence that the replacement of union flags by St George's Crosses among England fans first widely observed during Euro 1996 coincided with developments in Celtic politics that would subsequently see devolution in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland within a few years” (*BBC News Magazine*). In short, the shift in iconography was reflective of a shift in the political landscape of Great Britain – a reassertion of English distinction and solidarity amid anxieties over a fading hegemony.

The exclusionary and hyper-nationalistic nature of the home-grown policy can also be considered an institutional effort to calm anxieties over England's ailing football hegemony. While there remains a considerable gap in competitive ranking between England and the other British football nations,<sup>58</sup> most of the

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<sup>58</sup> The English Premier League ranks 1<sup>st</sup> according to the 2010 UEFA country rankings, compared to the Scottish Premier League's rank of 16<sup>th</sup>. Similarly, the England national team ranks 7<sup>th</sup> on the FIFA/COCA-COLA world rankings, followed by Scotland (41), Northern Ireland (59) and Wales (84) [as of 14 July 2010].

Celtic nations have emerged as recognized adversaries and competitors, both in head-to-head competitions and in terms of presence in international tournaments. The exclusion of these U.K. nations in the home-grown policy, then, appears based on their rising strength and perceived threat to England's dominant football position – for, exclusion would restrict access to the resources and infrastructure of the EPL and its clubs, as well as restrict access to top-level competition, which would put developing non-English U.K. players at a comparative disadvantage to their English counterparts.

Arguably, the only reason Wales is included in the home-grown definition is the (perceived) minimal threat it poses to both the EPL and the English national team. Given that all the leading Welsh clubs play in the English *Football League Championship* – the most affluent non-top flight football league in the world (Deloitte, qtd. in BBC News, *First Fall in Premiership Wages*) – the state of Welsh football proves reliant on English football institutions to stay economically viable. Moreover, as Tony Mason asserts, “[the Welsh] national side [is] used to being defeated by England” (93), which neutralizes the competitive tension between nation. This creates a strange dynamic where unity and inclusion are seemingly based on submission: as if Wales has accepted its inferior position, and thus is granted certain privileges that are denied to the other (defiant) nations.

Since the benefits and inclusion in the home-grown policy are based on a subservient relationship, the English-Welsh unity suggested by the home-grown

policy clearly proves problematic. The unbalanced power dynamic essentially demeans Wales' contribution to British football and positions the nation in the lower-echelon of British football society, along with those U.K. nations excluded by the policy. The policy therefore serves to uphold the EPL's sense of superiority over other U.K. footballing nations; and this sense of superiority promises only to sustain animosity and divisiveness within the United Kingdom. In a similar vein, the – albeit ironic – sense of unity achieved through the ABE movement proves equally unproductive. While some see the movement as a form of political resistance, and others as simply football banter (Kelly, *BBC News Magazine*), ABE is undeniably derisive and damaging, built out of a mutual resentment towards England. As such, it proves a regressive form of resistance and unity; like the home-grown policy, it promotes exclusion and division rather than reconciliation.

*The point about football in Britain is that it is not just a sport people take to, like cricket or tennis. It is built into the urban psyche, as much a common experience to our children as are uncles and school. It is not a phenomenon: it is an everyday matter. ~ Arthur Hopcraft*

Carrington and McDonald argue that “[t]he reason why sport has often been used politically to articulate nationalist and racist concerns is that sport is

perhaps one of the clearest and most public means in demonstrating how Britain has become a multicultural nation” (qtd. in Kassimeris 62). Considering the animosity and intolerance that has recently been articulated through football in the United Kingdom, the need to accept the multi-cultural reality of Britain and promote change in the mentalities of individuals, institutions and assemblies alike seems both necessary and reasonable. And given football’s ability to mobilize national sentiments and understandings of national identity, the EPL is in a prime position to catalyze such acceptance and change.

As a prominent and powerful institution in British, European and global football, one would expect the EPL to be progressive, creative and inventive: to demonstrate the ability to improvise and adapt to an ever-changing globalized world and the impact it is having on the state and face of football. The EPL, as one of the most diverse football leagues in the world, effectively embodies football’s ability to bring together people from all over the globe. But, rather than celebrate this diversity, the EPL has responded with fear and rejection. Operating behind the altruistic veneer of the home-grown policy, the EPL is posturing as a proponent of equality, promising to re-focus club priorities on youth development and sensible, sustainable spending. Yet, if this is the case, why does the policy focus so firmly on the ethnoracial identities of players while ignoring the financial inequalities within the league that create disparities in the competitive capabilities of respective clubs? With the shift in transfer priorities imposed by the policy,

smaller, less affluent clubs are made even more susceptible to the exploitation of their wealthier counterparts, who in order to remain competitive and profitable are forced to pursue a greater share of limited “home-grown” player market.

Ultimately, this shift in priority brought about by the home-grown policy threatens to find smaller clubs stripped of their top prospects and pushed even further to the periphery.

The policy-induced shift in priorities also pushes clubs to participate in the trafficking of young foreign players. Although this practice is an unintended consequence of the home-grown policy, the EPL is nevertheless aware of the causal effect (Munro, *BBC - Sport*). The institution’s reluctance, however, to address the situation leaves players susceptible to exploitative and ethnoracially diminutive treatment, thereby undermining the altruistic nature of the policy and the organization; the EPL’s reluctance, however, also suggests that its priorities lie elsewhere. Underpinning the home-grown policy is an institutional desire to reproduce and replenish the white normative “English” presence in league football. By interpellating foreign youth into a “white, male, English order” (King 170), as well as directing resources to the nurturing and development of local “English” youth, the home-grown policy proves an effective means of retrenching the ethnoracial arrangement of power within the national sphere – for, as Avtar Brah argues, “[foreign] populations come to embody the site of difference and unfamiliarity where ‘old ways of doing things’ are in crisis” (279).



For the EPL, part of protecting the “old ways of doing things” also involves maintaining the hierarchical landscape of Great Britain. Zygmunt Bauman contends that “[i]t is an unavoidable side effect of *order building* [that]... each order casts some parts of the extant population as ‘out of place’, ‘unfit’ or ‘undesirable’” (*New Poor* 92, *emphasis original*). And under the home-grown policy’s clear articulation of inclusion/exclusion, the majority of the British nations are perceived by the EPL as unfit and undesirable players of the game. Undoubtedly, this derogatory hyper-nationalist mentality serves to exacerbate lingering historical tensions and divisions within the United Kingdom. However, it also serves to calm institutional anxieties over England’s faltering football hegemony – an issue the EPL clearly deems a top priority.

## CONCLUSION

*I think football would become an even better game if someone could invent a ball that kicks back. ~Eric Morecambe*

Since its invention over 150 years ago, very little has truly changed in football: the rules remain almost entirely the same, the masses are still captivated by the game, and institutions continue to exploit the sentiments the game arouses in order to ascertain power and profits. Much like the English empire's employment of football to indoctrinate social values in colonial subjects, contemporary football institutions use football to ingrain their own respective values and desires in football's subjects (players and fans). A dramatic rise in the global mobility of players over the past couple of decades – ironically created in large part by historically dominant football institutions such as the English F.A. and FIFA – has unsettled the traditional structure of football, and consequently, the hegemony of respective institutions over the game. As such, the prominence of policies and practices that promote ethnoracial singularity within the game proves not so much an attempt to bring equality to the game – as football institutions purport – but rather a means of restoring stability and strength to the institutions themselves.

In an industry that is allowed by law to define human beings as assets,<sup>59</sup> one must already question the institutional perception and ethical treatment of players. The exclusion built into the policies and practices put forth by such dominant football institutions, thus, serves only to exacerbate an already reductive situation – for the player’s potential and prosperity becomes limited not only by their marketability as a commodity, but also by their ethnoracial identity. Even should a player succeed in a “foreign” league or on a “foreign” team, he will nevertheless be denied any sense of belonging by the national peoplehood. In this regard, football appears nothing like how it is championed by authorities of the game. Former FIFA president João Havelange preaches that football is “a true religion which impassions the masses, and unifies in one language of noble effort, all the people of the world” (qtd. in Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 26). Although Havelange’s statement does bear some truth,<sup>60</sup> the institutional desire to retrench traditional concepts of national identity hinders such connectivity and divides the people of the world.

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<sup>59</sup> Sport is in fact the only industry that is allowed by law to define human beings as assets.

<sup>60</sup> For example, Warren St. John’s *Outcasts United* offers a remarkable report of how football fostered kinship and community for refugees in Clarkston, Georgia. Moreover, it illustrates the ways in which visibility and positive representation enabled through football aided in (at least beginning to) reconcile tensions between the town’s “white” and “foreign” population. Dave Bidini’s article *Shoot it harder, lads!* about the homeless World Cup also offers insight into the ability of football to create bonds between people of different backgrounds, break down stigmas and offer empowerment to the marginalized.

Such divisiveness ultimately underscores the need for structural change in football. Dominant institutions – especially FIFA as the governing body of the world football – need to move beyond limited and limiting policies, and instead, devote attention and resources to the systemic imbalances and injustices that continue to hinder genuine equality in the game. As caretakers of the sport, these institutions have a responsibility to *everyone* that participates in the game: not simply a select and selected few. Paul Ince suggests that such inclusivity and diversity in football has the ability open up opportunities for minorities and generate tolerance of difference within and across nations (qtd. In Kassimeris 60). Christos Kassimeris furthers this claim, noting that younger generations in Britain are less tolerant of racist behavior in and around football (96). This emerging attitude suggests a very real possibility for progressive change in the near future, the potential for a multicultural environment that genuinely embodies a mixing and merging of equals, rather than mere tolerance of minoritized others and foreign others. However, the stringent hypernationalistic definitions of national identity being put forth by football institutions threaten to undo this progress and potential.

The hypernationalistic nature of such institutional policies and practices reinvest historical – but illusive – ethnoracially singular national identities with meaning. They serve to retrench socio-historical hierarchies and inequalities through the continued exclusion and intolerance of foreign others. The

discriminatory legacy of football's imperial past, thus, can still be seen operating in our contemporary social structure. The re-establishment of such socio-historical ideologies ultimately provides security and stability for football institutions; the respective national populations, however, are not so fortunate. Amid a globalized world of blurred boundaries, the stringent definitions of national belonging promoted by these policies and practices generate insecurity and anxiety in the national peoplehood regarding the ethnoracial state of both the nation and football. This insecurity and anxiety ultimately mobilizes intolerance and violent behavior as a way of consolidating group identity.

Ultimately, football remains as much an imperial tool as it does a sporting activity. Its ability to galvanize the masses has made it an ideal instrument of exploitation and authority. While football has the promising potential to foster tolerance and interconnectivity, unrelenting institutional control over the game has virtually closed off the channels it offers for reconciling inequalities and injustices that pervade the game and the world. Thus, despite being heralded as *the people's game*, football has never really belonged to the people – at best the people “just play it, or stand on the periphery... watching twenty-two players struggle for control of the ball” (Sugden and Tomlinson, *Contest* 231).

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