Molding and Moving Bodies in a Neoliberal World: African Football Labor Migrants in Egypt

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By Andrea Groves

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Abstract

Egypt has a large profitable football industry that increasingly attracts the attention of both football agents wanting to earn income from another market and sub-Saharan football players hoping to further a career by using Egypt as an intermediary between their home countries and Europe. The labor migration of sub-Saharan football players to Egypt has been enabled mainly by neoliberal, market-orientated changes adopted by FIFA, the CAF, the European Union, and the Egyptian football industry itself. Yet more importantly it is the individual actors that implement and take advantage of these hegemonic spheres of influence. This thesis explores how these individual actors and sub-Saharan football players have negotiated the neoliberal project. Specifically it shows the changes brought by localized mutations of neoliberalism as well as its continuities how they affect the ways in which sub-Saharan football players in Egypt move, work, and live.
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Figure 1. Comic Strip by Tarek Shahin
Key Players

Charles, Nigeria, 23 years old
Charles is playing for his second club in Egypt where he has been for several years.

Napoleon, Nigeria
Napoleon was traded to Egypt, where he has lived for the last five years.

Mouctar, Cote D’Ivoire
Mouctar is a well-traveled player who has developed his skills in two other Arab countries.

Henry, Ghana, 21 Years old
Henry came to Egypt with the help of an agent and completed a successful try-out.

Thomas, Nigeria, early 20’s,
Thomas earns $200 (U.S) a month with a second division team in Egypt.

Aquib, Nigeria, mid 20’s
Aquib is an uncontracted player who came to Egypt independently without an agent.

Zinedine, Guinea, 25 years old (football age, 18)
He chose to come to Egypt alone and had to work in a café to survive in Cairo.

Paul, (country not designated to protect identity), mid-20’s,
An Egyptian agent recruited Paul after competing against Egypt’s National team.

Maleek, Nigeria
Maleek has been in Egypt for a year since he tried out with the aid of his agent.

Castro, Ghana, 23 years old
Castro’s current club paid his transfer fees from his club in Ghana.

Martin, Ghana, 27 years old (football age, 21)
Martin wants to become a ‘coordinator’, connecting talent with agents.

Fred, Ghana, 23 years old
Fred hopes to use football in order to travel abroad to further his studies.

Ricky, Ghana, 23 years old (football age, 21)
Ricky contract is almost finished. He is unsure where his career is headed.
Sports Agents

Mohammed, Egyptian football agent
Mohammed is the enemy of fans and clubs. His sole end is to move players abroad.

Ehab, Former Egyptian football agent
Ehab left the trade because he need to more stability and time with his family.
Introduction

In the last interview I conducted for this thesis, a Ghanaian football\textsuperscript{1} player in Cairo, Egypt named Castro responded to a question about the importance of having a developed curriculum vitae: “Some of the coaches, they look at your CVs and your DVDs and then they invite you for a try-out…Some of them look at it and they buy you straight away.” With this answer Castro gives insight into his subjective experience while he also interprets, in a wider sense, the employment of football players by football clubs as something gained through a purchase. Though this might be a simple observation, it is relevant to a broader situation.

In Castro’s case, his present Egyptian club “bought” him when it negotiated a transfer fee with his former Ghanaian club in order to obtain the legal right to employ the player. These transactions of labor have grown exponentially since the 1980s within the global football industry, which occur both locally and transnationally. Based on original ethnographic research including the personal accounts of football players like Castro in addition to an in-depth research of secondary resources on the subject of football migration, this thesis shows among other things that a series of neoliberal, market-oriented changes within FIFA and the European Union regulations as well as club activities in the 1980s and 1990s have facilitated the dramatic increase of football labor migration globally. This thesis argues that these transformations and neoliberalism are mediated through cultural situations, economic ideology, individuals, and personalities such as team managers, which together facilitate a sub-Saharan player’s migration to Egypt while also simultaneously shaping his subjective experience of this migration and

\textsuperscript{1} Like much of the world and previous academic literature, I use the term football to reference what Americans refer to as soccer.
the life he establishes in Egypt. Football players' experiences of migration to Egypt are conditioned not only more generally by a hegemonic neoliberal regime that has developed new ways of commodifying and objectifying players but also by more specific networks of agents that ensure that, despite a hegemonic overarching framework of neoliberalism, different players are experiencing it in different ways and in different places depending on chance encounters.

Some of these transformations that are mediated through individuals and economic ideology are as follows: In 1981 FIFA implemented a ruling that forced clubs to release their players so that they can join their national teams for international competition around the world. A year later, FIFA followed up this change by eliminating limitations on the number for overseas club players allowed to compete for a national team in international competition (Alegi 2010:93). Known as the Bosman Ruling, in December 1995 the European Court of Justice created free agency by ruling it illegal for clubs in European Union countries to charge a transfer fee for a player whose contract had expired (Magee and Sugden 2002: 425). Probably the single most significant change of all has been the decision to increase and even completely deregulate the foreign player quotas in individual national football associations, which opened up spaces for more foreign labor. For example, England completely deregulated their labor market to allow for any number of foreign nationals\(^2\), which has come with much criticism from fans and nationalists.

\(^2\) The transnationalism of the European Union has effectively complicated the concept of a foreign player (a non-national) within its territory. After the Bosman Ruling, it became illegal to restrict the employment opportunities of foreign European Union member citizens within and between Member European Union National Leagues. This ruling was extended in 2003 under the Kolpak Ruling to include citizens of certain non-member states that has signed association agreements with the European Union such as Slovakia,
Prior to these (de)regulations players were transferred between clubs, but they occurred at a rate far less than presently experienced. Driven by specific neoliberal policies, these laws have effectively lessened the regulation of player movement within the global football industry and have significantly impacted African football. My thesis focuses precisely on the intricate ways in which these neoliberal transformations in the African football scene affect the everyday experiences of sub-Saharan African football players when they migrate to and live in Egypt.

Based on Mensah’s (2008) definition, I understand neoliberalism as a bundle of ideologies and policies that seek to further expand global capital accumulation through free trade, financial deregulation, and privatization with the assistance of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), and their associated organizations (1). Furthermore, as Harvey (2005) has described, neoliberalism is a theory of political economy, which “proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade” (2). Specifically with regards to the football industry, neoliberalism has taken hold of and thoroughly influenced the industry thereby creating a completely new socio-economic landscape in which football players compete, live, and move. As a result, borders have been loosened and the relationship between employer and employee has become casualized.

Although in the first instance employing concepts such as “loosening of borders” makes neoliberalism come across as a simple and vague phenomenon, the localization of

which at the time was not a member of the European Union. Therefore a foreign player indicates an individual who does not fall under either of these rulings.
neoliberalism is a very complex process with sometimes counter-intuitive effects. For example, the glamorous life that one imagines when thinking about professional football players, in particular the earning of large salaries, the opportunity to travel, the potential celebrity status, various endorsement deals, and the opportunity to play in heated competition, is in direct contrast to the lives of the players I have talked to in Egypt. As I address in chapter one, merely looking at the large amounts of capital that circulates within the Egyptian football industry, one might conclude that this glamorous life indeed exists for all the players in Egypt (and it does for the top Egyptian players). However the experience of sub-Saharan football players in Egypt is very different. Most of them find their lives to be quite boring, repetitive, and overly controlled by their employers.

Neoliberalism struggles to come to terms with its simultaneous counter intuitive support of individualism and corporatism. In order to navigate this tension, neoliberalism has justified more business friendly practices because corporations provide individuals with capital to consume. Counter to this, neoliberal thought has through the regulations discussed earlier actually in this introduction, favored the individual player and facilitated a decrease in the formal commodification of football players globally because of the creation of unrestricted free agency. A club no longer has any legal rights to retention once a player’s contract has finished. Previously, through the retention system, an interested club was obligated to pay an indemnity to gain right to employ the player they desire even after the expiration of the player’s contract with his previous employer. Players are no longer contractually obligated through a retention system to negotiate with their club after the expiration of their contract in order to be allowed to play for another club. Despite the formal rules, the manner in which players described being traded and
employed such as Castro did in this introduction invokes a subjective experience that remains being a commodity and a object because of the neoliberal and commercialized regime they live in. The language of commodification has become so ingrained in their thought that they refer to themselves within classical neoliberal economic terms that seep into their everyday language.

The ultimate mutations of neoliberalism are unpredictable because its final implementation relies on local actors, certain situations, and a very particular cultural context in Egypt. There is a confluence of individual actors, social and cultural norms, the Egyptian government, and a global phenomenon of neoliberalism. They shape the local situation for the sub-Saharan African football players in this thesis. While these local regimes and actors constitute neoliberalism, in this specific context, we must always remember that neoliberalism and its discursive effects also constitutes the actors and local regimes as well. It is the totality of all these actors and factors that propel sub-Saharan football labor migration to Egypt and create a unique subjective experience during their time abroad.

This thesis aims to answer the following questions: What role does Egypt play in this larger global football industry? How do players and agents experience this role? How does Egypt’s role within the neoliberal global football industry enable and facilitate sub-Saharan football labor migration to Egypt? How do these players navigate these hegemonic regimes of influence in their everyday lives? In answering these questions, this thesis brings together ethnographic research into conversation with several bodies of scholarly inquiry. I examine previous literature about football in the social sciences and I also engage with concepts of labor and commodities as the second area of inquiry.
Lastly, I explore interpretations of how commercialization and neoliberalism has affected the global football industry, while further addressing how these processes facilitate international labor migration.

**Football and the Social Sciences**

Much of the social science literature on football has focused on the consumption side, especially fandom, with a resulting preoccupation with questions of identity. As there is a wide body of literature on the subject of identity, I will choose to concentrate on two predominant themes: syntactic and semantic forms as well as ritualistic group experience, which are used to theorize football identities in the context of fandom. These scholars’ insights regarding identity and fandom are highly relevant to Egypt and shape how sub-Saharan football players see themselves in relation to their fans.

Giulianotti (1999) suggests that social identities are structured through football rivalries are constructed through semantic (defining themselves by understandings of what they are) and syntactic (defining themselves based on understandings of what they are not) forms. He argues that football identities tend to favor syntactic formations in realizing themselves through oppositions that is inherent within competition. Giulianotti claims that these binary and sometimes triangular oppositions formed by structured relations, shape the identity of fans, players, teams, managers, and other staff. Similarly, Dimeo (2001) argues that the identities of two rival clubs in Calcutta are created in relation to and in contrasting discourses of “the other.” These fans identify themselves through acknowledging the “other” as something they are not.

In contrast to Dimeo (2005) and Giulianotti (1999), Robson (2000) develop the idea of *commemorative ritualization*, which draws upon previous scholarly work by Bourdieu (1977), Connerton (1989), and Bloch (1989) to understand how groups provide
individuals with memory and a collective imaginary. These groups frame and localize memory through “mapping” or locating memories within material and mental spaces. Robson sees the rituals of football fans as not isolable cultural events, “but rather an extension of the everyday, a collective practice premised upon the summoning up of an operational and activated holistic (bodily, affective) experience of group identity and tradition” (9). Robson argues that football fan identity is embodied and expressed commemoratively within habitual group experience, which simultaneously convey and maintain collective knowledge of the past.

Sub-Saharan football players in Egypt become fully aware of these football identities when they or their colleagues are publicly noticed and sometimes encouraged by sports fans to improve their game by being subject to physical assault. Yet this fan centered approach predominant in the literature has left actual football players unexamined. There is a relative lack of ethnographic research conducted on professional football players with the notable exceptions of Magee and Sugden (2002), who used qualitative methods to complete a typology of football migrants in Europe and Kelly and Waddington (2006) who argued that managerial control and abuse stems from the traditional authority that managers embody within professional football in Britain and Ireland.

The dramatics of a Zamalek-Ahly derby gives the point of view that for fans the club’s success is the ultimate goal as well as perhaps harassing the opposing team’s fans. Sub-Saharan players experience football from a starkly opposing viewpoint. They neither share fans’ collective knowledge of the past nor experience the commemorative ritualizations, which fans as a group experience. There is a disjuncture between fan
identity and a sub-Saharan football player who cares little about a team’s longtime rival. Though winning the Egyptian Cup would be an achievement, football players do not experience it in the same way as a fan would. Sub-Saharan players see beating Ahly or winning the Egyptian Cup not as a triumph over a rival, but as a means of garnering exposure to lead to better contracts and positions abroad. This thesis provides a player centered point of view missing in previous literature.

This dearth in the literature can partly be attributed to a lack of access to professional football players. Many clubs limit their players’ abilities to discuss the club without authorization or supervision. Moreover, the ability to contact a sports celebrity presents significant challenges to an ethnographer in comparison to the easy access to fans. Fortunately, my research in this thesis has been able to deviate in certain situations from this pattern. However, my gender presented its own limitations in conducting participant observation of football practices and a player’s interaction with club staff because as a woman I was unable to attend practices or team related meetings and social events. Club rules also made it a risk to talk to me because players were restricted from interacting with women to whom they were not married. The topic of interactions between females and sub-Saharan football players is put into context in chapters four and five.

**Labor and Commodities**

Previous football literature has used the concept of commodification to discuss club produced branded merchandise, football imagery used as commercial vehicles of non-sport related organizations, and relationships between fans and market-orientated clubs (see Giulianotti 2002, 2005a, 2005b; Ben-Porat 2009; Conn 1998, 2004; McGill
However in Moor’s (2007) analysis of past literature, she argues that the concepts of consumption, commodification, and class are over-generalized within these works. Perhaps most significant in her analysis is her observation that many of these authors seem to confuse commodification and consumption for what is really taking place in the football industry that being commercialization (132). In order to theoretically understand commodification of sub-Saharan football players in Egypt, I look outside of football literature and engage Karl Marx’s manuscript, *Capital, A Critique of Political Economy* (1906) in understanding the player position as a labor source. In contrast to previous literature, I use the concept of commodification specifically to describe the process by which an object, services, or something traditionally neither a good nor service (such as human beings or the environment) is given value with intrinsic aspects defined by Marx (Polyani 2004: 4). Labor and commodities are important concepts that help to explain the dynamic of a player’s employment.

To understand these concepts, I looked at particularly Marx’s theories. I take from his work understandings of a commodity, use-value, exchange-value, and price. These concepts are relevant to understanding the hegemonic regimes sub-Saharan football players are subject to because their subjective experience is connected with understandings of commodification and objectification. Every commodity has a price, a use-value, and an exchange-value. The use-value represents the utility of the commodity, the exchange-value is the value of the commodity in relation to other commodities, and lastly the price refers to the monetary exchange-value (Marx 1906:42). Inherent in the process of commodification is objectification, which I define using
Foucault’s (1994) definition in which a person is objectified when he or she becomes a subject. In chapter four, I bring together this concept of surplus value and the rest of Marx’s work on labor and commodities with Becker’s (1975) theory of human capital to rethink and examine commodification in a neoliberal context.

Contemporary studies of labor in anthropology concentrate on transnational and domestic migration as well as mutations of neoliberalism on labor practices. In a recent study of labor, anthropologist Aiwa Ong (2005) contributes to a new understanding of labor practices by exploring the notion of labor arbitrage, which is relevant to this research because sub-Saharan football players are used as sources of cheaper labor. Arbitrage refers to the practice of buying something at a very low price in one market and redistributing it in another higher priced market to exploit price discrepancies. Although arbitrage of items is not new, the arbitrage of labor is. As an example, Ong uses the case of Indian laborers in the high-tech industry who were contracted to work in California but at much lower rates than local American hires (2005:160-1). Like these South Asian contract workers in the Silicon Valley, African football players in Egypt and Europe represent labor arbitrage where their skills are imported to save costs, thus increasing profits for the football clubs that “purchase” them.

Labor arbitrage allows companies or football clubs to pay one labor pool less than another. For example, Alegi (2010) states that the pressure of commercialization has forced smaller European clubs to import foreign labor because it allows them to maintain competitiveness while earning a profit through lower operational costs (102). In the specific case of Egypt the inexpensive imported labor pool includes sub-Saharan players (in the past even some Brazilian players).
Darby et al. (2007) brings attention to the fact that football clubs also partake in off-shoring, which means that this developing labor pool is dislocated geographically, through exploiting talent from elsewhere (Ong 2006:160). The global football industry based in Europe has realized that labor can be developed and trained in less expensive environments through acquisitions of African football clubs and establishment of football academies in West Africa. The most talented developed labor can also be sold, with great profit to European clubs (Darby 2007:149).

Labor arbitrage is pertinent to this research because it commodifies the player by instilling them with a territorialized monetary value. Though on a formal legal level, football players are less commodified because of the creation of unrestricted free-agency, labor arbitrage remains an unregulated way in which agents and clubs commodify players. The commodification of players has been vastly impacted by commercialization and neoliberalization, which have sought to expand profit margins and cut operational costs with such tools as labor arbitrage. Football players are commodified through mechanisms that seek to improve the human capital, price, and use-value of the player in order to not only improve the overall spectacle of competition, but also for sale in the football labor exchange markets.

**Transforming Football Through Neoliberalization and Commercialization**

A wide body of literature explores the relationship between globalization and football in terms of commercial impact and migration (see Magee and Sugden 2002; Giulianotti and Robertson 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2009; Taylor 2006; Tiesler 2008; Rowe 2003; Alvito 2007; McGovern 2002; Darby 2002; Close and Askew 2004; Lanfranchi
and Taylor 2001), yet there is a lack of literature about neoliberalism’s relationship with football. This thesis aims to fill this gap in the literature through examining commercialization in Egypt, a player’s subjective experience, commodifying regimes, and how individual actors constitute and take advantage of neoliberal ideals.

As previously discussed in this introduction, neoliberalism’s deregulating influence on the global football industry facilitated the Bosman Ruling as well as the regulations implemented by FIFA during the 1980s which together created unrestricted free agency. This influence has been attributed to the increase in football labor migration (see Alegi 2010; Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001; Magee and Sugden 2002; Darby et al. 2007). In 1981, FIFA implemented a ruling that forced clubs to release players for international competition with their national teams (Alegi 2010:93). In addition, in 1982 the organization rescinded a 1965 ruling which had limited the number of overseas club players allowed to compete on a national team to only two (Alegi 2010:93). This represents a tension within neoliberalism that has to negotiate favoring both corporatization and individualism, which are two contradictory sides of free market ideology.

Neoliberalism’s focus on generating large amounts of capital operates through the commercialization of the sport. Yet, previous literature has not considered commercialization within the broader phenomenon of neoliberalism (see Brown 1998; Conn 1997; Morrow 2003; King 2003; Sandvoss 2003). Many scholars have theorized commercialization of football, specifically the ways in which it has reshaped how fandom is experienced by taking into account how satellite television and relaxed broadcasting rules have created new spaces of consumption and experiences for football fans globally.
(see Crabbe and Brown 2004; Brick 2001; Goldblatt 2006; Dubal 2010). I share Dubal’s (2010) view that neoliberalism’s market driven ideals have made profit and corporatization of the game the central focus of its discursive project that is enabled by the mechanism of commercialization (125).

Commercialization is both an outcome and a tool of neoliberalism. In this thesis, I draw upon Bourdieu (1998) for my understanding of commercialization. Bourdieu argues that football became commercialized when association football (domestic leagues) was no longer solely played or practiced, but also performed as a spectacle (16). Bourdieu (1998) expands upon this viewpoint by not only recognizing that commercialization is an extension of the free market and neoliberal polices symbolized by the Bosman ruling, but also by addressing the fundamental development that has reconstructed football as a form of spectacle, specifically televised spectacle (16-7).

A major determining principle of all these changes is that alongside football as practice, and alongside sport undertaken by amateurs, particularly in small-town clubs where people can play amateur sport until they are quite old, has arisen football as spectacle. This latter is produced in order to be commercialized in the form of televised spectacle, a commercial product (1998:16). This product—football as a commercial product— is widely accessible to consumers worldwide. Therefore, it takes less capital to explain and interpret the game, as the consumer has played and is confident in his or her understanding of what is taking place before them (Bourdieu 1998:16). Furthermore, Bourdieu makes the argument that the commercialization of football is a possible reason for scouts to travel to Africa and underdeveloped countries, where underprivileged classes serve as nurseries to the commercialized football teams in order to be more competitive (1998:16). This links to labor arbitrage where there is a precedent within the European football industry to
purchase and create football academies in West Africa as a method of developing labor abroad at a cheaper cost.

**Individual Agency in Global Flows of Labor**

It is agreed upon in the anthropology of sport that contemporary football labor migration is a consequence of current economic and political relations within football globally (see Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001: 186; Darby et al. 2007: 143; Taylor 2006: 8). Taylor (2006) theorizes that football labor migration “reflects a complex set of linkages between specific countries or sets of countries—linkages that have deep social and cultural and historical roots” (8). Current football labor migration scholarship is guided by the understanding that migrations flow from South to North following Eurocentric neo-colonial patterns (see Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001:186; Darby et al. 2007:143; Poli 2008:2). These authors have also incorporated a historical-structuralist perspective from within a wider discursive understanding of transnational labor migration to analyze football labor migration.

Marxist thought contributes to the historical-structuralist approaches, which includes Wallerstein’s (1997) World-Systems Theory and other dependency theorists (see Frank 1967). They frame “migration in the context of a global economy, core-periphery relations, and the development of underdevelopment” (Brettell 2000: 103). Divisions of labor and the proletariat have been internationalized to explain the imbalance between high-wage labor importing countries and those with low wages and labor emigration (Brettell 2000: 103) by dividing them into the core (the most developed economy), the semi-periphery (a buffer and intermediary between the core and the periphery), and the periphery (the least developed economies).
Multiple authors have adopted this approach in attempting to explain football labor migration (see Darby et al 2005; Giulianotti 2005; Magee & Sugden 2002; McGovern 2002; Darby 2002). For example, Giulianotti (2005) argues that football clubs, which lie geographically, economically, and symbolically within the periphery, adopt a feeder role serving stronger football markets in order to survive, yet keeping in mind that this feeder periphery “is itself internally stratified.” Another example is Darby et al (2005), which draws upon Andre Gunder Frank’s (1969) theory of dependent underdevelopment. According to Frank western countries represent the “core,” which dominate the periphery by controlling the way in which trade is conducted in the global capitalist system. Thus, within this particular theoretical framework Europe is viewed as the core of the football industry, and it is the relationship between Europe and the periphery that most previous literature of football labor migration has focused on (see Darby et al 2005; Giulianotti 2005; Magee & Sugden 2002; McGovern 2002; Darby 2002).

Research on the stratification of the periphery within the greater football economy includes inter-African football labor migration to South Africa and Asian football labor migration to South America (see Corelissen and Solberg 2007:295; Taylor 2006: 29). Cornelissen and Solberg (2007) observed that over the last decade South Africa has started to emerge as an “intermediary…drawing talent from an African ‘hinterland,’” and providing a mostly temporary station to players who seek to gain from its relatively advanced training infrastructure” (308). Past football labor migration research, which focused on Europe has acknowledged foreign migrants playing in Egypt, but only within a couple of sentences (see Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001: 186; Darby et al. 2007: 143).
Going beyond such limited perspectives my research seeks to contribute to the growing literature about football labor movement within Africa and between the semi-periphery and the periphery.

Integral to theorizing football labor migration to Egypt is to understand how various independent local actors facilitate transnational movement within the context of a neoliberal hegemonic sphere of influence that has specifically created easier movement between states and resulted in the casualization of employment. Multiple authors have attributed the increase in labor migration during the 1990s to sports agents but they do not present an argument that addresses how these local actors perpetuate movement (see Lanfranchi and Taylor, 2001; Darby et al. 2007). Lanfranchi and Taylor (2001) state that agents are “crucial in the historical development of the international transfer market [and] agents are widely regarded as a key factor in the acceleration of football migration in the 1990’s” (5).

Poli (2008) attempts to fill this gap by calling for a different perspective on football labor migration that is not solely based on the world systems theory, but also employs a connectionist network approach. It became immediately apparent in my research that these sports agents hold a huge amount of influence over a player’s migration experience and his decision-making process. Although dependency and world systems theories provide an understanding of migration between more peripheral and more central points in the world economic system, they fail to account for the human agency involved in any given football player’s migration.

To understand how independent actors facilitate football labor migration to Egypt, I employ the connectionist approach to migration by Meyer (2001), which contends that
skilled migration has many active developed networks and channels with an invariable number of agents that allow for migration flows from the periphery to the core (92). These various agents within the global football industry include football agents, sports agents, salaried club recruiters, tipsters, local businessmen, foreign expats, local football clubs and teams, and independent and football academies in Western Africa. Human mediation is important to the migration process; it is more than just a minor outlying factor, leftover from supply and demand. As Meyer argues, “they [human agents] are more than mere instruments. They are components and determinants of the migration process” (194). In order to access information about these individual actors, I used ethnographic research methods, which are addressed in the following methodology section.

**Methodology**

In order to answer my thesis question about how sub-Saharan football players in Egypt negotiate and navigate different competing hegemonic spheres of influence, I looked at how these players are subjectified. I collected my data over a three-month period in the spring of 2010 and over another one-month period in the fall of 2010 when the league recommenced after its summer break. In addition to these specific periods, I have maintained friendships with many of the players I interviewed and have continued to learn more about their subjectivity and experiences. While completing the required curriculum for this master’s program, I had multiple opportunities to experience and observe matches played by the Egyptian national team as well as matches within the National Egyptian Football League.
I used two qualitative research methods to conduct my fieldwork: semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Participant observation allowed me to build relationships with my interviewees, and these relationships in turn enabled me to gain their trust and share some of their social and cultural rituals such as how players negotiate public space in Egypt, a Nigerian wedding, and West African food. I also used participant observation as a method of observing Egyptian fandom during the 2010 World Cup qualification matches against Algeria and important National Egyptian League matches. At these events and other social occasions, I also had informal conversations with several other sub-Saharan football players as well as Egyptian football fans.

My main method of acquiring data was through semi-structured interviews with football players and sports agents. I completed ten formal semi-structured interviews with thirteen sub-Saharan players and two Egyptian sports agents. Three of my informants showed up with a friend, which was always a pleasant surprise because they were able to expand upon each other’s answers. I tried to ask open-ended questions and allowed the players to guide the conversations as much as possible. As I conducted more interviews, certain themes became apparent which allowed me to specifically address certain topics, such as age falsification, in subsequent interviews. These interviews took place usually in cafes and on two occasions on a church’s grounds.

*Locating my Sample through Facebook*

In February of 2010, I rode the Cairo metro to the suburb of Maadi, where a large number of expatriates in Egypt reside, to meet Napoleon who was a Nigerian player visiting his friend in Maadi during his weekend off. Napoleon played football in the
Mediterranean city of Alexandria in Lower Egypt. He was the first person I interviewed. I was quite nervous; I was not certain about what to expect. He drove himself to the cafe in his own car provided by the football club. What I noticed first about him was his hairstyle: neatly braided in cornrows dangling down around his neck. It was a labor-intensive hairstyle. It was obvious that he took great care in his appearance. He did not wear any athletic gear, but styled himself with jeans and a basic t-shirt that allowed his large gold necklace to be the center of focus—a display of his wealth. Both of his ears were pierced and seemed to have diamond studs in them.

I had contacted Napoleon via Facebook, after researching every sub-Saharan player in Egypt using Wikipedia and Soccerway.com. Although the majority of the players were untraceable on Facebook, some had what Facebook calls a “Fan Page.” Supposedly created by the fans of the players these “fan pages” contain posted videos, photos, and articles about each player and allow fans to show forms of support them by engaging in conversation and sending words of encouragement. It was only later that I found out that some of these players had actually created the pages themselves.

Even though Facebook markets itself as a social networking platform before my thesis reseach I had never utilized it to make social contact with strangers. I had only befriended and engaged with people that I had already known. I started by Facebook search for informants by sending short messages asking if the football players were interested in being interviewed. Most agreed and then added me as a friend on Facebook. I accepted their friendship hesitantly, unsure whether it would have negative consequences. Some I did not add immediately because I consciously tried to delay it as long as possible until I actually met them. It was not long after I started to friend players
on Facebook that their other football-playing friends would add me without even knowing me at all. Some of these friends would later become my informants as well, creating an almost virtual snowballing effect. In the end, I was in contact with enough players to field a team on the field and have a couple waiting on the bench.

The Egyptian law limits the number of foreign players per team to only three. Ghanaians and Nigerians make up the majority of the African football player population in the country, which is also representative in my sample. In the table below, players are divided by their nationality. They are grouped together based on the specific process through which they came to Egypt: whether they were club-recruited, agent-assisted or if they were “independent”, meaning they came without an accompanying agent or team recruiter. These terms are further developed as a typology in chapter two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Club-Recruited</th>
<th>Agent-Assisted</th>
<th>Independent players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cote d’Ivoire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country withheld</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though Facebook aided my ability to establish contacts in this industry, I believe that it also hurt my chances of constructing a relatively serious and professional

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3 The player’s nationality is withheld to protect his identity.
relationship with some players. Despite the fact that I had explained to them my research, and they understood what I was doing, some players still thought it was appropriate to flirt with me. I was asked out on a couple dates and even received one love letter from an informant who had met me only three times. Some complemented me on my pictures tagged on Facebook, which made me feel uncomfortable at times. Through the privacy settings that Facebook provided, I eventually limited what players could view on my Facebook page. It was suggested to me later that I should have created a “fake” account to be able to network on Facebook, while maintaining my “real” account to engage socially with friends. In hindsight, despite these awkward situations, Facebook was the fastest way to contact players and network with athletes. My research would have been harder to complete without it.

Lastly, what further helped me obtain interviews and befriend the players was my nationality. It was because I am not Egyptian that I was able to meet with many of these players. A Ghanaian player named Castro introduced at the beginning of the chapter told me at the start of our interview: “It’s okay. I came because you weren’t Egyptian.” Many players have negative perceptions of Egyptians and Egypt in general. Being American allowed me to gain access to a community, which tends to shelter itself from Egyptians in order to perhaps protect its privacy and to limit gossip by football fans, which they claim, is a problem. This issue of privacy in the context of surveillance and discipline is addressed among many other topics in chapter five.

Chapter Overviews

In order to answer how African football players negotiate neoliberal hegemonic spheres of influence throughout their migration to Egypt and professional careers within,
I have divided the thesis into five separate chapters covering the Egyptian football industry, migration, and commodification, and subjectification. In chapter one I analyze how the economic climate, commercialization, and relatively easy access to Egypt from the periphery have allowed Egypt to become a desirable location in which to do business as a sports agent and to play as a sub-Saharan football player.

In chapter two, I introduce each player by creating a typology that serves to analyze the context of an African Football player’s migration to Egypt. This typology is used analytically in later chapters as well. The chapter serves the logistical need to introduce all the players mentioned in chapter three without disrupting the flow and argument of the later chapter.

Chapter three and four together argue that the commodification of African football players takes place in two contexts: the migration process and investments in human capital to create surplus value. In chapter three I illustrate the ways in which these processes of commodification are the products of neoliberal hegemonic spheres of influence, which have influenced the football industry globally. I also argue in chapter three that African football labor migration to Egypt is the result of human mediation meaning that sports agents and other professionals use their social networks to facilitate transnational migration. The facilitators take advantage of price discrepancies between the sending country and Egypt, otherwise known as labor arbitrage as they earn a percentage of the contract signed by each player. This process results in the commodification of the football player, which I expand upon in the next chapter.

In chapter four, I examine the price and values of football players by combining two very different theories and perspectives: Gary Becker’s classic economic theory of
human capital and Karl Marx’s radical economic theory about labor and commodities. These theories are applied to the present neoliberal global context. The chapter argues that the investment in human capital by clubs and sports agents is inherent in the process of commodification of football players as the means to creating surplus value through the trade and loaning of players on the global and Egyptian national labor exchange market.

Finally in chapter five, I shift from the perspective of the football industry and its commodification to that of players’ subjectification in Egypt. I employ Foucault’s (1994) theory of objectification in order to analyze the creation of the subject through disciplinary practices. My goal is to demonstrate that even though the relationship between the employee and the employer has been casualized due to neoliberal deregulations, the club still perceives these players as objects and commodities.

These five chapters work together to conclude that neoliberalization has changed the way in which football labor moves, develops, and lives. Football players’ bodies are worked upon, shaped, and manipulated by other humans to form a certain product that has a use-value for the club itself, an exchange-value should the club decide to sell the player, and price, which is determined through negotiations with the club. The body of the player is subjected to hegemonic disciplinary spheres of influence which shape the body to be younger, to migrate, and regulate the mobility and social interactions of the body to increase the use-value and the human capital of the player.
1. Why Egypt? A Semi-peripheral Nodal Point

Sub-Saharan African football players arrive to a strong and developed football and sport culture in Egypt. Contemporary Egypt has adopted modern sport through the social changes created by French and British colonialism. The development of nationalism and socialism under Nasser also stimulated sport activities in Egypt (Sfeir 1989:185-87). The British occupation and protectorate from 1882 to 1922, introduced football as well as field hockey and cricket to the Egyptian population (Sfeir 1990:190). Football out of all the sports has remained popular in Egypt; it has a far reaching hold over majority of the population. Identified by politicians and citizens alike as the
national sport, football is the most popular sport in Egypt. Played by all classes, it transcends the economic and cultural divisions in Egypt.

This chapter discusses not only the popularity of football in Egypt, but more so the capitalization of the football industry and how it entices foreigners to migrate to Egypt to play football. The Egyptian Premier Football League is in no way isolated from the neoliberalization of European football as discussed in the introduction. In many ways, the Egyptian football league mimics the same contemporary changes in Europe, most prominently the commercialization of the sport whereby the league and clubs have embraced corporate sponsors. This embrace was brought about by the decreased funding of sports organizations by the Egyptian government, leaving teams and federations little choice but to venture into sports marketing (Alafandi and Séguin 2008:1). The decreased funding has affected the football industry, but not as much as other sports in Egypt. Many clubs still receive government funding and has stalled privatization of the football industry. Several football clubs have also embraced commercialization, which has brought new wealth to the league and some clubs. There are some clubs that have had success in marketing themselves, but generally sports marketing has developed slowly in Egypt (Alafandi and Séguin 2008:1).

As discussed earlier in this introduction, football is on the conscience of many in Egypt especially during important national matches. This has allowed for not only economic capitalization, but also political capitalization by political leaders and the media. Together these factors create a better market of sports consumption, which has allowed the league to retain top players by being able to provide competitive salaries created from this revenue. This potential revenue is attractive to foreign sports agents
and players as well as Egypt’s relative easy access in comparison to Europe, “the core,” which is harder to penetrate. This chapter argues that economic and political capitalization, coupled with vibrant football fandom, available capital, and the lowering of boundaries between African states, facilitate and encourage football labor migration to Egypt.

**A History of Egyptian Football**

The British occupation of Egypt began in 1882 (El Sayed 2004:1). Like everywhere else in the British empire, the British brought their armies, their government officials, and English sport. In 1903, the first football club, Al-Sekka Al-Hadid (Railway) was formed with British and Italian railway engineers as players. Though football competitions were widespread in Egypt, a fully organized Egyptian League was only created with the royal decree of King Farouk in 1948. Eleven football clubs participated in the first season of play, with Al Ahly Sporting Club taking home a thirty kilo silver and wood trophy at the conclusion of the season (El Sayed 2004:2).

Al Ahly Sporting Club was formed in 1907 in Cairo, Egypt. It had several different sports teams. The Al Ahly football team initially included some European players, but it became exclusively an Egyptian club in 1924 (Alegi 2010:3). Al Ahly also became a venue for colonial resistance; its red uniforms symbolized patriotism against British colonial power during the late 1920’s. It is known among Egyptians as just Ahly, which translates into *National* in English. Al Ahly remains today the most successful football team in Egypt and Africa (Alegi 2010:22). Ahly won the first Egyptian League championship in 1948-1949, which was also the first league championship to be played in Africa (Alegi 2010:57). Similar to the rest of North Africa,
Egyptian league championships had a competitive and talent imbalance. The majority of the talent was centered in the capital of Cairo. Al Ahly and their longtime rival, the Zamalek Football Club, won all but one of the league titles between 1949 and 1962 (Alegi 2010: 58).

The Zamalek Sporting Club was originally founded in 1911 as the Al-Mukhtalat Club (El-Sayed 2004:1). Al-Mukhtalat means “mixed” reflecting Zamalek fans whom Montague describes as having tended to be a mix of “the British, their allies, and the awkward squad: the authors, poets, and intellectuals” (2008:2). The Zamalek Sporting Club was the club of the unpopular King Farouk who the club was originally named for. The sporting club’s name was changed to Zamalek following King Farouk’s abdication (Montague 2008:2). Zamalek’s white uniforms were symbols of British colonialism and foreigners, which also now coincidentally sport Frito Lays’ Chipsie logo, a foreign company (Montague 2008:2). Ahly, in contrast tended to attract the support of the poor, the religious, and nationalists. These dividing lines of support remain today (Montague 2008:2).

Zamalek and Al Ahly have had a longtime local football derby (a sporting contest between two cross-town rivals) since Zamalek ended Al Ahly’s decade long run as Egyptian league champions in 1960 (FIFA Classic Football 2009:1). Today, games between the two teams result in noticeably less foot and car traffic in and around Cairo. This rivalry has sometimes resulted in destruction and death causing the canceling of the entire league in the early 1970’s. The Egyptian government has gone so far as to situate the games at neutral venues and to import foreign officials to prevent partiality and claims of it (Montague 2008:1).
Vibrant Football Fandom

“The Egyptians were so happy during these matches [Algeria vs. Egypt] they said that it was better to score against Algeria then win the cup. Even if they lose in the final they do not care, they are just happy to score against Algeria. It is their biggest rival.” –Napoleon, Nigeria

Even as a foreign student, I became caught up in Egypt’s football fever. I cannot help but wonder now why I waved the black, white, and red Egyptian flag while balancing myself through the sunroof of my friend’s car as he took the sharp corner off the Six of October Bridge in Cairo, Egypt. Cairo is famous for its over-exhausted infrastructure and its heavy and erratic traffic, which filled the streets once again after the game ended in the late evening. I joined others in jubilation after having witnessed through the magic of satellite television, Egypt’s triumph and revenge against their longtime rival Algeria during the semi-final of the 2010 African Cup of Nations. They would go on to win their third consecutive African Cup of Nations in Angola a couple of days later.

Victory in international competitions can inspire millions of people to celebrate in the streets of Alexandria and Cairo. Egyptians enter the streets on foot, by car, or on motorcycles celebrating major national victories such as the 2010 African Nation’s cup semi-final against Algeria in Angola. This game provided even more elation, as it was the revenge for Egypt’s loss against Algeria during 2010 World Cup qualifications in November 2009 (Gettleman 2009:A6).

All over Cairo flags were waved and the national anthem was sung. Cairo reached frenzy before the match had completely finished. Those on foot blocked and halted vehicle traffic by serenading each passing car with a victory dance, as someone would...
drum songs and beats to keep the crowd rambunctious. Men danced on cars and trucks as well in circles with other men. Men lit on fire the liquid of hair spray cans and others spit mouthfuls of gasoline through torches for a larger flame. Many of those stuck in cars, joined the celebrations by beeping horns, waving flags out their windows, propping their bodies outside the car windows by sitting on the ledges or popping out of the sunroofs like myself. Children did not have bedtimes; their faces were decorated with black, red, and white face paint. They blew horns and waved flags. Their fathers and relatives placed them on their shoulders, and they joined their families for celebration joy rides around the city. The older children were allowed to dance on top of the car roof when they were not moving. Women joined their compatriots by car and in limited quantities on the street dancing in the neighborhoods of Cairo. In downtown Tahrir Square, young Egyptians filled the square dancing, yelling in celebration and causing the local policemen to panic, as they hopelessly tried to control the crowd’s movement and enthusiasm. The fans slowly made their way to the bridges over the Nile, where they continued to hold up traffic to the early hours of the morning. For days after, people continued to beep their car horns in the same repetitive rhythm at random times to continue the celebration. That night, I had taken it upon myself to wear red and not resemble an Algerian supporter; however no Algerian would even have thought of leaving his or her apartment that evening, after having witnessed extreme backlash against Algeria during the World Cup Qualifiers in November 2009 where Algeria had triumphed over the Egyptian Pharaohs⁴.

⁴ Egyptian Pharaohs is the colloquial nickname for the Egyptian National team.
After leaving one of the many over-crowded cafés, my friends and I joined the celebrations on the street. My Egyptian friends felt the need to express the excitement with a drive around the city. With three of us sitting in the back seats and three in the front, we took off to connect with rest of the city’s excitement while listening to loud house and hip-hop music. We were fortunate to have access to an Egyptian flag, though my friend felt it was not enough and she tried to grab someone else’s flag from the street. Unfortunately, I sat in the middle back seat unable to fully experience and react sufficiently to those who were celebrating on the street. After those sitting in the front were tired of waving the flag, they handed it to me; I then popped through the sunroof giving me the full view of the madness on the streets. Despite it being after midnight, traffic had come to a near standstill on the Corniche, the street that runs along the Nile river, as Egyptians crowded the streets on foot and by car in celebration. The traffic resembled heavy congestion more typical of late afternoons in Cairo.

What my observations demonstrate is that football fandom is a public event in Egypt. Celebration takes place in public spaces with large numbers of people outside the stadium. It is a social gathering that includes rituals of song and melody such as cars horns and drumming. It is a large social interaction that takes place in cars, on the street and in parks. These public celebrations were possibly the sole large public gathering permitted by Hosni Mubark’s regime. His regime capitalized on this vibrant fandom and encouraged it with the exception of Egyptian Ultras Fan groups. The Egyptian football industry is able to harness large amounts of available capital through commercialization and sports marketing practices from the vibrant fan base that creates a large number consumers as explained later in this chapter.
In the previous section, I demonstrated that Egyptian football fandom centers upon public gatherings. The mass appreciation and support of football in Egypt not only results in interesting rituals, but is also manipulated politically by the government, journalists, and even former President Mubarak himself. Football has successfully been a part of Egyptian national consciousness since the 1920’s and has mediated conversations about race, civilization, and modernity (Lopez 2009:41). Football victories create enormous nationalist speech within published literature and media. When Egypt won the Africa Cup of Nations in 2008, Al-Ahram Weekly wrote:

They said it could not be done—an off-white country capturing the Africa Cup of nations (ACN) in darkest West Africa, home to the continent’s mightiest teams. And indeed, despite being defending champions, Egypt was some way down the list of pre-tournament favorites, an afterthought kept in the shadows by the likes of Ghana, Ivory Coast and Cameroon, (2008:14).

Egypt acknowledged its position as an intermediary station in a “development circuit” during their bid to host the 2010 World Cup. The bidding committee presented

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5 Figure 1. Comic Strip by Tarek Shahin
Egypt as an African nation where other Africans came to practice in a “more modern locale in which to improve not only their skills, but also their ability to cope with the challenges of modern football playing nations” (Lopez, 2008:283). Unfortunately for Egypt, FIFA awarded the right to host the 2010 World Cup to South Africa. After FIFA’s announcement, Karim Hafez on Egyptian delegation’s website analyzed why Egypt lost the race to host the World Cup. His questions went beyond football. He created allegories comparing Egypt’s defeat as a reflection of Egypt’s social, political, and cultural failures. He questioned why Egypt’s delegation could only produce one internationally known celebrity, Omar Sherif, while South Africa had six including Nelson Mandela, Charlize Theron, and Desmond Tutu. Football became an allegory for Egypt’s failures internationally and domestically (Lopez 2009:300).

Although FIFA did not award Egypt with the honor of hosting the FIFA world cup, Egypt hosted the under twenty FIFA World Cup in the fall of 2009. It was the subsequent World Cup qualifiers after this competition against Algeria that electrified the country in nationalist sentiment. The media, politicians, and the Egyptian government capitalized on this moment to take advantage of the population’s distraction from domestic issues.

The Egyptian-Algerian rivalry surrounding the 2010 World Cup qualification was modern day dramatic spectacle in its creation in the media. In 2009 Algeria and Egypt played three qualifying matches against each other. The first game was held in Algiers, where Egyptians charged Algerian supporters with purposely causing extensive noise pollution. This prevented Egyptian players from properly sleeping the night before their game causing Egypt to lose the match in Algeria (Racelma 2009:1). Their next match
was played in Cairo. The Algerian team claimed to have been pelted by rocks as their bus made their way from Cairo International Airport to their hotel. Several players were injured from the rocks and shattered glass that spilled into their bus. Egyptians mocked the injured Algerian players during the second match, which ended in a tie that secured a third game on neutral territory in Khartoum, Sudan. The Egyptian media claimed that Algeria had staged an elaborate hoax and that the bus was never attacked (Aiba 2009:1). Algeria’s claim has been taken seriously by FIFA because of video evidence provided by the team themselves. For not protecting the Algerian team when they were in Cairo, FIFA has penalized Egypt by charging them a fine of 70,000 Euros and stipulating that Egypt’s first two home matches of 2014 World Cup qualifiers take place at least a hundred kilometers away from Cairo (Sadek 2010:1). About a year and a half later, a friend who has acquaintances with one of several Ultras fan groups divulged to me that one of the groups planned and orchestrated the attack on the bus.

The third match played on November 18th, 2009, resulted in a loss for Egypt that disqualified them from the World Cup finals in South Africa. Egyptians did not react calmly to this loss. The country became angry during the days after the match. The Egyptian government, Egyptian press, and media made several claims that infuriated the Egyptian population against Algeria. An Egyptian sports agent, Ehab told me that after attending the match in Khartoum, his bus was attacked by fans. Aligning with the Egyptian media, he also told me that the Algerian government sent planes full of prison convicts that were told to attack Egyptian fans. What is interesting about Ehab is that he is very well educated, but still believed everything the media and government had hyped.
The foreign press reported that the Egyptian government was using this moment to distract citizens from the real problems Egypt faces.

Fueled by their government, the Mubarak family, and media reports after the game in November 2009, Egyptians marched in protest of Algeria into the upper class island neighborhood of Zamalek. The crowd halted traffic around the city for several long hours, as they sought access to the Algerian Embassy in the middle of a normally relatively calm neighborhood. The protests turned violent on 26 of July Street, where protesters threw rocks at windows of multiple businesses destroying property and making a complete mess of the area. The crowd grew and made noise till early morning. The protests disrupted already overcrowded traffic flows across the city. The immediate vicinity of the Algerian Embassy was blocked from car traffic, to keep potential protesters away from the Algerian Embassy. The streets that provided access to the embassy gave the impression that Egypt was preparing for war. Several dozen green-boxed trucks lined the streets filled with Egyptian riot police waiting to stop any potential violence that might arise. The Algerian Embassy continued to receive extra security from Egyptian police forces several weeks after the riots.

As demonstrated in the previous section and this current section, football is on the Egyptian national conscience. Football has a widespread fan base that reacts emotionally to competition results. During Mubarak’s regime, football was manipulated politically to create the sense of an imagined community and to evoke nationalist pride to distract the citizens from important domestic issues. This large amount of fandom facilitates sports marketing and commercialization ventures that do not need to educate their market.
The Organization of Egyptian Football Leagues

The Egyptian Football League system is multi-tiered with one premier league and several lower tiers or levels competing to move up in ranking. All levels employ African football labor, but not all teams choose to employ foreign labor. There are currently multiple nationalities playing in Egypt. The labor comes from beyond Africa including Brazil, Turkey, and other Middle Eastern countries. By law, each football team is only allowed to employ three foreigners per squad. Palestinians are counted as local players. This policy is fairly conservative in comparison to Europe, such as England, which maintains no foreign player quotas. Sixteen teams compete in what is currently known as the Etisalat Egyptian Premier League, which is named after its sponsoring telecommunications corporation. Below the premier league sits the second division teams, which are divided into three groups and are translated into English as A, B, and C. Each group maintains sixteen teams. Together there are sixty-four teams within the Egyptian Football Leagues, all of which are subject to promotion and relegation⁶ determined by their overall season results.

An English woman who worked in the refugee services community once told me that she “would be able to field several teams worth of Africans for the number of times I was told by someone that they were in Cairo to play football.” The population of African amateur football players in Cairo is very large. They come from many walks of life and

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⁶ Promotion and relegation are the processes by which teams are transferred between divisions and in the case of Egypt second division groups based on their season’s standings. The top two teams are promoted while the lower two teams are relegated to a lower division.
many countries. The lucky ones find contracts at football clubs, yet many struggle to survive in Egypt.

Not every team fills its foreign player quota. At three foreigners per team, there are legally 192 potential spots for foreign players in Egypt on 64 teams with in the Premier League and lower divisions. At the beginning of September 2010, forty-four of the potential forty-eight spots in the Egyptian Premier League were filled by foreign players. Of those forty-four, other Arabs from Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Syria, Libya, and Morocco filled six of those positions. The remainder was from Sub-Saharan Africa; Ghanaians dominated this group comprising 36% of the population with fourteen individuals. Nigerians had the second largest foreign population with a total of 6 players in the Egyptian Premier League.

Commercialization and Capital in the Egyptian Football Industry

Egypt has not been immune to these trends such as global commercialization and neoliberalization of football as described previously in the chapter. Egyptian sports organizations, such as the Egyptian Sports Council and the Egyptian Football Federation, have been traditionally funded and supported by the Egyptian state and not the private sector (Mohammed and Ibrahim 2006b). In recent years, this has changed and available government funding has been cut dramatically (Alafandi and Seguin 2008:1). Alafandi and Seguin theorized that cuts in sports funding were the result of economic downturn. The prominence of neoliberal budget cuts and the International Monetary Fund’s restructuring program during the 1990s in Egypt is most likely a more specific explanation as to why the government reduced their spending on sport. Yet there remain exceptions to this even in the Egyptian Premier League.
In regards to football, Mubarak’s regime has continued monetary funding as a means to perpetuate propaganda and as some Egyptians believe in order to distract the population from domestic issues. Egyptian Ministries and state-owned companies own the majority of Egyptian football clubs (Dorsey 2011d:1). Half of the clubs in the Egyptian Premier League are state-owned (Dorsey 2011e:1). Since the revolution, charges of corruption have been made against Mubarak’s petroleum Minister Sameh Fahmy, who gave generous handouts to football clubs owned by the ministry, including Eneppi and Petrojet, and he further funded Division two teams, Gasco and Petrol Asyut (Dorsey 2011f:1). FIFA has insisted that state involvement in Egyptian football clubs be reduced and that these clubs become privately owned (Dorsey 2011e:1).

Previous marketing literature has discussed sports marketing in Egypt as a reflection of commercial trends globally (see Mohammed and Ibrahim 2006a). What is striking about the Egyptian sport is that some marketing trends seen in many parts of the world have not appeared in Egypt, particularly sports marketing towards the female population. Present Egyptian commercialization discourse is only concerned with marketing matches as well as selling broadcasting rights and commercials in the form of billboards in stadiums and team sponsorship (Mohammed and Ibrahim 2006a:115). There is also a lack of market research that would encourage sports federations to take advantage of marketing opportunities (Mohammed and Ibrahim 2006b); however, currently there are laws in Egypt that restrict commercial activities of football clubs. The 2011 revolution put on hold a drafted law that would permit non-profit football clubs to merchandise their brand by creating commercial companies (Dorsey 2011f:2). There are only two “commercially run” Premier League teams in Egypt (Dorsey 2011f:3). Despite
a lack of large amounts of sports marketing, marketing techniques that are perhaps the most profitable have been embraced by the Egyptian football industry. As previously stated Egyptian Premier League’s main sponsor is Etisalat, a United Arab Emirates telecommunications company, which has a mobile network in Egypt. Many teams have corporate sponsors beyond just sporting companies. For instance, Ahly’s jersey sports the German Telecommunications Company and Egyptian mobile service provider Vodafone’s logo.

This amount of commercialization coupled with a larger economy and available capital allow for sports agents and football players to benefit more from contracts in Egypt than at home. There are larger amounts of available capital in Egypt than in most other countries in Africa, thus facilitating migration by having a more profitable market. Egypt football leagues also benefit from the wealth of the country. The GDP per capita in Egypt is $6,200, which significantly larger than most countries in Africa with exception of Tunisia, Morocco, and South Africa. Egypt’s population of 82 million makes it a much larger market in comparison to most other countries in Africa, while also having a sizable upper and middle class. To compare, Egypt has more than double the annual GDP per capita than the countries with the two largest populations of foreign players in the Egyptian Premier League. Ghana and Nigeria have a GDP per capita of $1,600 and $2,400, respectively. In terms of Egypt’s GDP (purchasing power parity), Egypt is the richest nation in Africa. The financial successes of some clubs have created exorbitant differences between the average income in Egypt and football stars in Egypt. Ismaily star Hosni Abd-Robou earns five million Egyptian pounds annually (around 850,000 U.S. Dollars), while about half the country lives on about two dollars a day (Maher 2011:1).
Since the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, the football industry has gone through upheavals and restructurings in order to deal with the economic consequences of the Egyptian League’s postponement. The Egyptian Football Association has proposed salary and transfer fee caps in order to deal with the football club’s financial issues resulting from a lack of generated income due to competition delays on account of the Egyptian revolution (Dorsey 2011e:1). Dorsey, who is observing the Egyptian Football League, has remarked that the revolution will change football in Egypt over the long term (see Dorsey 2011e:1; Dorsey 2011d:1).

**Lowering of Boundaries**

Within the capitalist world system, Egypt is more developed than most other African countries, but not as developed as the core, which includes the United States and Europe. There is debate about the position of Egypt within dependency theory. Wallerstein (1997) believes Egypt lies in the semi-periphery while Chase-Dunn, Kawano, and Brewer (2000) see Egypt as belonging in the periphery. When applying world systems theory to the football industry, the capitalization of football industry in Egypt situates it as semi-peripheral country within this network that feeds Europe. Egypt’s leagues are far more developed than the periphery, yet less so than the core. Because Egypt lies outside the core, it is more accessible to the periphery.

The core of the football industry, Western Europe, is hard to penetrate and hinders football labor migration. By contrast, outside in the periphery, movement is far easier. Egypt has much more relaxed visa regulations than European states. Players of many nationalities are simply required to buy a fifteen-dollar visa at the airport upon arrival in Egypt. There are no visa interviews, no verification of employment, or attestations of
financial stability. Geographically, Egypt has fewer boundaries for other Africans and it is more easily accessible than Europe. This openness facilitates African football labor migration to Egypt. The accessibility does not translate to viewing Egypt as a viable alternative to Europe, but as stepping-stone to Europe.

**Conclusion**

Egypt has become a nodal point within football labor migration because it has liberal visa regulations that create lower barriers to entry into the country, vibrant football fandom, commercialization of the football industry, and sizable amounts of capital within the league and its fan base. This makes Egypt an appealing location for sports agents to do business and facilitate migration of foreign players. The Egyptian Premier League provides salaries that entice their own Egyptian players to remain in Egypt instead of migrating to Europe. This allows the league to remain competitive because a “muscle drain” affects Egypt less than other African countries. The competitive league is enticing to foreign players looking to improve their skills and CV to enable them to eventually play in Europe. These factors influence Sub-Saharan African players to perceive Egypt as a nodal point or stepping-stone between the periphery and the core. For these African players, Egypt is not as desirable of a location as Europe, but it is better than home with greater available resources for them to improve their profile in order to eventually sign a contract with a European club. In order to arrive at this temporary stopover, multiple actors enable player movement. The context of these migrations of sub-Saharan African players is organized as a typology in the next chapter, which also serves as an introduction to the players I interviewed.
2. A Typology of African Football Players in Egypt

Sub-Saharan African football players migrate to Egypt because of Egypt’s position in the semi-periphery and football industry, which provides an attractive location to play professionally. Specifically, the Egyptian football industry has large amounts of available capital financed by commercialization and government funding that enables African players to obtain higher salaries than available in their home countries. The preferable financial condition within the Egyptian football industry translates into better football infrastructure and coaching staff, thus increasing the human capital of the football players. These benefits create an attractive stopover in one’s professional football career that sub-Saharan African football players hope will lead them to Europe. Despite the common goals and attraction to Egypt, the players in my sample have varying paths that brought them to Egypt. They have experienced different levels of monetary and professional success in Egypt and elsewhere. They are not a homogeneous group, but a group of people who have experienced many of the same hegemonic processes to varying extents. This chapter seeks to introduce the players in an organized fashion and provide a preface to chapter three. By introducing them in a separate chapter, chapter three is able to focus on theorizing human mediation within football labor migration without interruption. This is typology is also used analytically in later chapters. The players are divided into three sub-groups based on the circumstances of their migration to Egypt that include independent, agent-assisted, and club-recruited.
The first sub-group of players are those who do not fit previous explanations of football labor migration (see: Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001:186; Darby, and all 2007:143; Poli 2008:2). They are self-motivated, self-funded, and independent of an agent or club recruiter when they migrate to Egypt. This does not mean that they are free from influence from those within the football industry, but at the moment of migration, they have no contractual obligations to a football agent or anyone in the football industry. I refer to them as independent players.

The second sub-group of football players is made up of those who came to Egypt accompanied by an agent. A player travels to Egypt where his agent will arrange try-outs with various clubs. Some succeed and some do not. It is most important to understand that the agent is an integral part of these players’ migration process. The agents initiate the interest to travel and work in Egypt. Some agents provide airfare and some do not. Agents often abandon players who do not obtain contracts. I refer to these players as agent-assisted.

Lastly, the third sub-group contains players that have traveled to Egypt at the invitation of a football club in Egypt. The club, rather than the agent, is the initiator of the migration. This is not to say that an agent neither accompanies nor is responsible for the networking to create this opportunity. It is important to understand the clubs’ invitation is vital to the migration process within this particular sub-group’s experience, which I refer to as club-recruited players.
Independent Players

Thomas, Nigeria

Thomas is an uncontracted player from Nigeria whom I met through my work with refugees. He migrated to Egypt by himself without the guidance of an agent, as he explains: “I have been here since December 2007. I worked before in Nigeria and saved my money so I could sponsor myself to come to Egypt.” When I first interviewed him, he was earning money teaching Sudanese refugees, while trying to find a contract and an agent. He spent most of his time practicing with Nigerians and participating in exhibition matches in order to showcase his skills. Six months after I initially interviewed Thomas, he obtained a contract with a small second division group C team that paid him 200 U.S dollars a month as salary.

Aquib, Nigeria

Aquib is an uncontracted player who has lived in Cairo since November 2008. The number of other independent players in his situation “is uncountable as there are so many in Egypt,” he explained to me. He uses his university degree to teach science in order to support himself. He was paying 200 Egyptian pounds a month to attend an Egyptian Football Academy in Giza, a suburb of Cairo, that he says is owned by the Premier League Club, Al Zamalek. They train him and help him stay in shape. He has become an irregular migrant in Egypt because his visa has expired. He originally migrated to Egypt through the influence of other players, agents, and members of the football industry, who told him that Egypt had good contracts available. He sponsored himself to come to Egypt and traveled by himself. He struggles to find an agent to represent him, despite FIFA’s website listing the official agents in Egypt. He believes that the lack of an
agent hinders his progression in his career, but also feels Egypt does not offer the opportunities that were advertised to him before leaving Nigeria.

**Zinedine, Guinea, 25 years old (football age, 18)**

I first met Zinedine over sodas at an Ahwa (shisha/coffee shop) in downtown Cairo. My Guinean colleague randomly met him on the street in Maadi and gave me his contact information. Problems regarding his family’s debt caused him to leave Guinea; however, he also believed that he had to leave for Northern Africa in order to further his career:

> No… There is no one who told me [to come to Egypt]. Me, I should even come to the Maghreb, that means Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia. If I should leave, it for to go to Europe, or the United States, or Canada or something like that. But it is because my parents are in debt. They paid money to leave [Guinea]. They have some debt. They have a little credit. I left. After, I had some problems there. I am not able to return to Guinea because my parents have some problems. When I return, it was not good.  

Zinedine paid for the cost of moving to Egypt. He successfully obtained a contact with a football club through the help of an Egyptian agent, but the club failed on their obligations and did not pay him his monthly salary of 500 Egyptian Pounds. He left the club with the encouragement of his agent. As of September 2010, he had obtained another contract with a second division team.

**Agent-Assisted Players**

**Henry, Ghana, 21 Years old**

I met Henry after he attended church in Victoria Square in the Cairo Suburb of Maadi on a Friday afternoon. On his way from church to meet me, policemen, who were fans, were

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7 Original quote in French: Non… il y a pas quelqu’un qui m’a dit [venir en Egypte]. Moi, je devrait même pas venir la Maghreb ça te dit l’Égypte, la Maroc, la Tunisie. Si je devrais sortir c’est pour partir en Europe ou aux États-Unis ou le Canada ou quelque chose comme ça. Mais c’est parce que mes parents ont endettés. Ils ont payé d’argent pour sortir. Ils ont peu de dette. Ils ont peu de crédit. Je suis sorti. Après j’ai eu des problèmes là bas. Je pouvais pas me retourner en Guinea parce que mes parents ont des problèmes. Quand je me retourne C’était pas bon.
stopped him so they could be photographed with Henry and “kiss” him. Henry came to Egypt because of the encouragement of his Ghanaian agent who traveled often between Egypt and Ghana. He stated: “The agent encouraged me. The situation there is self-encouraging. You want a better life. I paid for everything on my own, but then the club [Egyptian Club] refunded me after I did the tryout and I signed a contract with them.” Henry came without the guarantee of a contract and invested his own money to further his career. He was one of the lucky ones who were able to obtain a contact very easily and was actually reimbursed his investment by his new Egyptian club.

**Fred, Ghana, 23 years old**

I met Fred, the day before he left for Ghana during the league’s summer break. I met him at a café in the Cairo suburb of Maadi where he was staying with his friend Ricky, whom I also interviewed. Fred came to Egypt on the expense of his Ghanaian agent. He tried out with an Egyptian club who offered him a contract. He currently plays in Alexandria. He migrated to Egypt to further his career with the ultimate goal of playing in Europe. Besides football, he hopes to eventually to complete a master’s degree in Europe, as it will help obtain employment back home in Ghana after he finishes his football career.

**Ricky, Ghana, 23 years old (football age, 21)**

I met Ricky when he accompanied his friend Fred to an interview that I had arranged. Ricky was living in New Maadi in an apartment provided by his team. He came to Egypt through a French agent who he described as taking his money and running away. Ricky paid for his ticket because his agent did not know his skill. He explained: “because if the agent manger knows your skill, they will pay for you; if they do not, they will have you pay, and possibly reimburse you.” He feels he was completely misled by his agent who
brought him to Egypt and then when he initially did not obtain a contract, the agent fled leaving Ricky behind in Cairo to fend for himself. He was able to obtain a contract with the second tier team on his own through contacts he had made before his agent left. Ricky’s contract was almost finished by the time I met him and he had no opportunities coming his way. His past experience with his former French agent has made him reluctant to try to obtain a new agent.

**Martin, Ghana, 27 years old (football age 21)**

I met Martin with his friend Castro at Johnny Rockets at City Stars Mall, an elite mall with many western brands that borders the Cairo neighborhoods of Nasr City and Heliopolis. Martin came to Egypt through his Egyptian agent who traveled often to Ghana. Martin’s agent arranged and paid for Martin’s transportation costs. He also asked several of his brothers and friends about Egypt to figure out if it was worth migrating to Egypt to play football. He decided to come to Egypt to complete several try-outs and eventually obtained a contract. Martin explained to me that without his agent, he would have been unable to obtain the contract because a recommendation, as in other forms of employment, is key to getting noticed and legitimized. Skills alone will not enable you move forward in your career. He hopes to have a future career working as a talent scout within the global football industry.

**Maleek, from Nigeria**

I interviewed Maleek who accompanied his friend Paul to an interview. He came to Egypt through the help of his Nigerian agent who had contacts in Egypt, and successfully tried out with his current team. He lives outside the neighbourhood where he plays in order to have more “freedom” because Egyptians tend to “talk.”
Club-Recruited Players

Charles, Nigeria, 23 years old

Charles has been in Egypt since 2006. He did not choose Egypt, it just so happened that another team recruited him through his agent’s networking. He stated: “I did not choose Egypt, it just came my way. My agent was able to obtain me an offer…I was playing in Nigeria. I have an agent and he was working with one of his friends here in Egypt. I had a contract with my club in Nigeria and the club in Egypt paid to change the contract.” Charles is a common example of the football player exchange and loan market, which routinely commodifies football players by negotiating transfers fees that the recruiting or new club pays the player’s home club to cancel the contract to obtain contract rights to the player. It is the network of his agent that greatly expanded his opportunities for exposure and contracts abroad.

Napoleon, Ghana

Napoleon is one of the few African players I have met in Cairo who plays defense. He has been in Egypt for nearly six years and has learned to speak Arabic. He came to Egypt because an agent scouted him for a team in Egypt. He did not seek to migrate to Egypt. The Egyptian club liked his CV and was able to negotiate a contract, as he explains:

The club there [in Egypt] was looking for someone with my skills. One agency looked at my profile online. They came to Ghana to watch our match. So they sent my CV to the club, I never knew there was a club here [in Egypt]. They liked my CV and so they requested for my services. They were able to pay the money, the transfer fee that my club in Ghana wanted. So they [Egyptian club] asked me if I wanted to go and I said no problem, I wanted to get a new life.
Napoleon is an example of commodification through the football labor exchange market. The Egyptian club in order to release Napoleon from his current contract had to pay the Ghanaian club a transaction fee of a negotiated value.

**Castro, Ghana, 23 years old**

I met Castro with his friend Martin who was introduced earlier in City Stars Mall near H&M. We met there because Castro lived by City Stars. He told me that he visits the mall often, which demonstrates a certain form of monetary success in Egypt because City Stars Mall is a more of an upper class locale with expensive western brands and foreign restaurant chains. They suggested we go to the American chain restaurant, Johnny Rockets, as it was less busy than other cafes. Castro explained to me for over an hour his experiences coming to Egypt and his life in Cairo. A Ghanaian agent with whom he had met several times was able to obtain him a contract in Egypt. He asked Castro if he was interested in playing for Egyptian team who was interested in him. Castro explained that he made the decision carefully, obtaining references from other players in Egypt to legitimize the club and the league.

**Mouctar, Cote D’Ivoire**

I met Mouctar in an Egyptian Café chain, Cilantro during the last evening of Ramadan during Iftar dinner before Eid in 2010. His friend who plays in Kuwait and his team translator accompanied him to the interview. The first thing I noticed about Mouctar was not his height or his clothes, but the iphone 4 he was holding in his hand, and I automatically thought he must be successful. As I went over his history, it was obvious that Mouctar has had a transnational career that has allowed him to work in multiple countries. Mouctar has had far more experience playing abroad than any other African
players I had met. He had played in another North African state and in one of the Gulf States before obtaining a contract with an Egyptian Premier League team. He secured his first contract abroad through the help of an agent; but an Egyptian team scouted and recruited him during a tournament in one of the Gulf States. His goal in Egypt is to win the national cup and he would like to play in Europe after his contract with his Egyptian team expires.

Paul, Africa (country not designated to protect identity)

I met Paul at Costa Café in Nasr City with his friend Maleek from Nigeria. Paul represented his national team during a match in Egypt against the Egyptian national team. Instead of returning home after the match, Paul remained in Egypt as several teams had scouted him during the game. He remained to complete try-outs and was eventually offered a contract. He lives with his teammates in an apartment provided by his team.

Conclusion

Football players migrate to Egypt under one of three circumstances; independently, as agent-assisted players, or as club-recruited players. These circumstances affect the way in which players experience the migration process. They present their own challenges and potential hurdles such as locating an agent, completing try-outs, abandonment by agents, paying for airfare, age falsification, and negotiating contracts. The migration process is discussed in the following chapter.
3. Departing Home: Agent Induced Movement

Football in Ghana and Egypt are different. There is a lot of money in football, and in Ghana everyone wants to travel so they can make it in life. – Fred, Ghana

Football labor migration between countries and continents has a long and complicated history. Anthropologists agree that contemporary football labor migration is a consequence of current economic and political relations within football globally (Taylor 2006:8; see also: Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001:186; Darby et al. 2007:143). Current football labor migration scholarship is guided by the understanding that migration flows to the North in Eurocentric neo-colonial patterns (see: Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001:186; Darby and all 2007:143; Poli 2008:2). These expanding migration flows lead to a “muscle drain” and poor development of football clubs and leagues in emigration countries (Poli, 2008:5). Most previous literature focuses on football labor migration to Europe (see Darby et al. 2007; Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001; Magee and Sugden 2002; Taylor 2006). As such while this literature relates to core-periphery relations, other scholars have started to examine semi-periphery and periphery relations.

Previous research on migration to non-European countries includes inter-African football labor migration to South Africa (Cornelissen and Solberg 2007) and Asian football labor migration to South America (see Taylor 2006). Over the last decade, South Africa has started to emerge as an “intermediary... drawing talent from an African ‘hinterland,’ and providing a, mostly temporary, station to players who seek to gain from its relatively advanced training infrastructure” (Cornelissen and Solberg, 2007:308). The idea of “intermediary” that Cornelissen and Solberg propose is important to this research.
in terms of understanding Egypt’s role within the greater global political economy of the football industry and the motivations behind sub-Saharan football players working in Egypt. Unlike South Africa, where foreign African football labor developed after political changes in the 1990’s, Egypt has been importing football labor since the 1980s. One of the earliest sub-Saharan African footballers to play in Egypt was Cameroonian goaltender Joseph-Antoine Bell; he spent several years playing for the Arab Contractors in Cairo during the 1980s (National Football Teams 2010:1). Egypt is a nodal point that connects not only Africa and Europe, but also Africa and the Middle East.

African football labor migration to Egypt cannot be understood through neo-colonial networks that use former economic and social colonial connections to create fluid flows of labor in south to north transactions, which are used to describe African migration to Europe (see: Lanfranchi and Taylor 2001:186; Darby and all 2007:143; Poli 2008:2). Egypt represents a different form of northern migration. Egypt’s only colonial venture began in 1820 when Wali Muhammad Ali Pasha invaded Northern Sudan (Collins 2008:10). After a series of failed Mahdist revolts in Sudan and a short-lived withdrawal of Egyptian and British troops from Sudan, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan was established through in January 1899 through a condominium, or a joint ruling partnership (Collins 2008:33). Sudan achieved independence from Egypt and Great Britain in 1956 (Collins 2008:69). The relationship between Egypt and Sudan remains strong today, however the migration that occurs between the two countries is mainly asylum seekers from Darfur. The remainder of Africa does not have any former colonial ties with Egypt except for a brief partial invasion of Ethiopia. Yet, Egypt is a former French and British colony and thus Egypt shares a colonial history with the rest of Africa. There are other
connections developed by sports agents that have facilitated African football labor migration to Egypt. As described in chapter one, what enables Egypt to be a worthwhile economic investment for football agents and an appealing environment for African football players is its more developed profitable football industry, coupled with Egypt’s larger economy and lowered boundaries that provide easier access.

These lowered boundaries are representative of the easier mobility within the periphery and the neoliberal loosening of restrictions by institutions, such as FIFA and other local actors. The deregulation is dependent upon local actors that implement neoliberal policies and ideologies resulting in unique local mutations. Local independent actors enable sub-Saharan football labor migration to Egypt. These individuals lower the obstacles of labor migration while also encompassing neoliberalism’s goals of free markets, entrepreneurial freedom, and free trade.

Football labor migration is the product of two desires. The first is of the football player who wants a professional career in Europe. The second is the desire of football agents to earn money. In terms of Egypt, the desire to play in Europe remains relevant because Egypt for football players is perceived as a nodal point between their home countries and Europe. For most players, Egypt is not somewhere they think of playing themselves. It is something proposed to them by sports agents and social networks. This chapter seeks to answer why, how, and with whom does a sub-Saharan African football player come to Egypt. I have used the network approach by J-B Meyer to understand how certain persons facilitate migration. This chapter argues that sports agents are the primary facilitators of football labor migration through the use of their professional networks coupled with migrant push and pull factors. Sports agents take advantage of the
favorable economic situation in Egypt and commodify players through labor arbitrage by obtaining contracts in a more developed higher priced market.

**Migrating From Sub-Saharan Africa to Egypt**

As discussed in chapter one, Egypt’s national league has sizable commercialization that primarily focuses on accruing wealth from certain broadcasting rights, team and league sponsorship, and billboard advertising within football stadiums. Other forms of sports marketing have not developed in Egypt because of a lack of market research which could convince sports bodies to invest in different forms of sports marketing (Mohammed and Ibrahim 2006b). Half of the 2010-2011 Egyptian Premier League teams are owned by government ministries or state-owned businesses. Backing from these institutions provides stable financial conditions for sports clubs in Egypt. Egypt’s Premier League developed profitable football industry, coupled with Egypt’s economic factors, and liberal visa regulations enables football agents, who primarily encourage football labor migration, to make worthwhile investments while creating an appealing environment for African football players.

World systems theory posits: “the international flow of labor follows the international flow of goods and capital, but in the opposite direction. Capitalist investment foments changes that create an uprooted, mobile population in peripheral countries, while simultaneously forging strong material and cultural links with core countries leading to transnational movement” (Massey et al. 1996:197). Spatially, world-systems theory constructs Europe as one of the powerful “core” that dominates economically, the southern periphery (Africa and Latin America). World-Systems theory explains relations of power by approaching the structures that enable the flow of commodities; however, it overlooks how local and transnational human interactions and
social networking constitute the structures of movement (Meyer 2001:95). For African football labor, a sports agent and his social network are the primary means to migration.

African football players are funneled through networks that start in their home countries and end in Egypt. Football agents are the primary propellers of these networks. These sports agents offer to accompany players to Egypt in order to try-out and acquire a contract. Sports agents recruit several players at once and bring them to Egypt in groups in order increase the odds of profiting from this time and monetary investment. The word “agent” connotes two different inter-related types of people. The word itself means someone who has an active role in facilitating migration, which I refer to as facilitators. These include managers, businessmen, sports agents, football industry officials, and other entrepreneurs. For players, a sports agent is someone who represents them and networks on their behalf.

Human mediation is important to the migration process; it initiates the movement of a football player’s body. It is beyond just being a minor outlying factor leftover from supply and demand. “As such they [human mediations] are more than mere instruments. They are components and determinants of the migration process” (Meyer 2001:94). Most football players migrated because of their agent’s networking whether they were assisted by agents or recruited by clubs. Others relayed information about Egypt to independent players. The independents also hired agents upon arrival; two of them have successfully obtained contracts as mentioned in their introductions.

Ghanaian player, Martin migrated to Egypt through his Egyptian agent, whom Martin described as traveling often to Ghana:

He was Egyptian. He usually comes to Ghana season to season. Then I met him and we spoke together he feel the style of my playing. So he can easily find a
team or something for me in Egypt here. And I said no problem and he took some of my CDs and my CV. I made a CV for him and I give to him. He said I should come to justify. I should come to try out so then I came [to Egypt].

Martin asked several of his brothers and friends about Egypt and whether it was a worthwhile opportunity before agreeing to travel to Egypt. Martin’s agent arranged and paid for Martin’s transportation costs. He then came to Egypt to complete several try-outs and eventually obtained a contract, as he explains:

So I came and it was a bit difficult but as time goes on, I start acclimatizing to the situation, the atmosphere. And they said I should wait for one week to two weeks to play for the team again for them to see how, I mean how impressive or what involvement they see on me. So after one week to ten days, they said no problem and they will sign a contract and he [the agent] spoke to them and they finalized everything and I go to play for the team. And I asked my brothers because of Aboutrike and AbouZaki the national players the national team players you know? They were well known so we want to play beside them. You see. You to be proud of it so I mean we end up being Half Egyptian, Half Ghanaian on the pitch playing.

Martin explained to me that without his agent, he would not have been able to obtain the contract because a recommendation, like in other forms of employment, is key to getting noticed and legitimized. Skills alone will not enable you to move forward in your career. He hopes to have a future career working as a talent scout within the global football industry.

Like Martin, Fred came to Egypt from Ghana at the expense of his Ghanaian agent. He successfully tried out with an Egyptian club in Alexandria who offered him a contract. A football agent is important to the migration of these athletes and their careers. It is only if one has a ‘good’ agent, that one’s travel costs will be reimbursed by a player’s new club through contract negotiations.

Ricky came to Egypt through a French agent who he described as taking his money and subsequently abandoning him after failed try-outs. Ricky paid for his travel
costs because his agent did not know his skill because the agent had not observed him enough. Ricky said: “because if the agent manger knows your skill, they will pay for you, if they do not, they will have you pay, and possibly reimburse you.” He feels he was completely misguided by his agent who brought him to Egypt. When he initially did not obtain a contract, the agent left Ricky behind in Cairo to fend for himself. He was able to obtain a contract with a second tier team on his own through contacts he had made when his agent was still representing him.

The network approach to migration understands that skilled migration has many active developed networks and channels with an invariable number of agents or facilitates that allow for migration flows from the periphery to the core (Meyer 2001:92). These various facilitators within the football industry networks include footballer agents, sports agents, salaried club recruiters, tipsters, local African businessmen, local football clubs and teams, and independent and European funded football academies in Western Africa. Most footballers do not leave their home countries by their own initiative; football agents and facilitators, create the initiative for them. We can draw upon many similarities between skilled migrants and football labor migrants.

The idea of networking and networks is not new to migration research. The social networks of migrants are key in helping them adapt and integrate into society by helping find accommodation, employment, and access social programs. The social networks also facilitate the migration of relatives by connecting them and qualifying them for national immigration programs (Vertovec 2002:3). The process of migration for skilled labor like football labor is different from unskilled migration. Skilled laborers tend to use non-kin contacts in their network to facilitate migration. Skilled migrants and football labor
migrants differ in the matter of whose social network is most valuable. A sports agent’s social network is far more important in facilitating the movement of football players than the football player’s actual social network. An agent’s social network obtains the try-out for their players and mediates contracts. Connections are key in enabling a career to progress to more competitive leagues. The social ties of the migrant or football player with his agent affect where he migrates, how he migrates, and “future prospects for physical and occupational mobility” (Vertovec 2002:3).

Within a West African footballer’s home country it is not uncommon to be approached by football agents promising players tryouts and success in foreign countries. In Nigeria alone, there are 119 licensed player agents (FIFA 2010:1). This does not include foreign football agents and scouts that travel to and work in Nigeria. There are also dozens of men who pose as agents and reap benefits from football players’ dreams of professionalism by misleading them and taking their money. Henry explains that agents are helpful, but you have to be careful: “even if you are hired from there [Ghana], it is easier to get to get a visa if an agent wants to hook you up. There are a lot of people who are not good agents. They claim to be able to get you a contract with Madrid. You give them money and they disappear.”

To understand the agent’s role in facilitating and expanding football labor migration, it is necessary to perceive the migration of football talent as not only a push and pull attraction, but a complex set of linkages that enable the flow of talent from Africa to Egypt. Martin, the Ghanaian player, himself works as a facilitator within the football industry. When I asked him what he would like to do after his career, he told me that he intended on retiring in five years no matter whether he had improved or not. He is
the only player who I met whose long-term goal did not involve obtaining a contact in Europe. His real goal in becoming a professional player was to be able to network in order to become what he termed as a “coordinator.” He initially described this career as a “manager, a coordinator of plays, money or something.” He has already started “coordinating” in his spare time. He currently has contacts in Ghana, Russia, London, Turkey, and Lebanon. He claims that he is not a sports agent. He wants to work to connect players with agents:

Not an agent… as such… you know agents… I mean agents… it’s like a restriction for someone, but being a coordinator you have an extra… I mean extra chance to penetrate. I am sitting. I am a coordinator. I can commit this one with this agent, this one with this agent. You know by being agent you have to be on your own, you have to go and fight. I mean I will search and give it to you, you as an agent. Then you fight for the player to get a team.

Despite claiming that he is not a sports agent, he will be a facilitator of migration and movement within the networks that he creates. I would describe him as a freelance talent scout. He also charges a fee of five percent of player’s professional contract, which he perceives as a small fee. Martin is an example of facilitators of football labor migration who are not licensed sports agents. They are not officially registered with FIFA or their country’s association or federation. Martin has neither passed the FIFA exam required to be a licensed agent nor does he intend to. He is working to become part an informal sector that networks in order to move players from club to club on a local and transnational level. These facilitators and sports agents are a necessary part of the football industry that move labor from club to club.

It is understood that one needs an agent in order to be able to further one’s career. As Castro explains: “as footballers, yeah, you need an agent because sometimes playing alone is not enough.” Agents go beyond just representation like a lawyer, but they are
necessary to market the player. Martin explained to me: “you need someone to marketize you.” When I asked him, if he marketed himself in reference to his work as a “coordinator” he replied while laughing:

Yes, exactly that is how we do in our transactions. You need to recommend. You have to recommend…I mean you need to get some skills and those things. You give out recommendation; it will be better and it will be easier. Most of the players, they are coming here [Egypt], too on that recommendation. So if you come, one match, two match… It is okay, then you will sign a contract. But without a recommendation, you keep on doing try-outs, try-outs, try-outs, try-outs till one month and they will say no you’re done.

A player needs to be marketed by a representative outside of the player’s own network in order to find a contract and move abroad. Martin continues to talk about what he calls “pragmatism” in order to explain the practicality of having contacts and a social network in order to match athletes with clubs as a quality service:

And they have something called pragmatism… I mean in the work of coordination or something the pragmatic in it sitting alone, sitting alone in the meditating how to bring things together how to bring things together then you utilize it you share in it. The amount of the agents [sic], I mean agents it takes a lot of, I mean things or factors. There are some factors that need to be considered in order to get to use I mean things. You need to sacrifice you need to a match how do you call it? A quality service and quality service will never be established unless you have I mean the thing of the pragmatic. Humiliation or sometimes I mean players are lost you know a lot of things as a process as you know. You need to sacrifice as well in order to get to it.

Like in other forms of skilled migration, there is a large interplay between the employer, the football player, and their connection. Meyer explains that “the pre-existing relationship between the (future) employee and the employer through the intermediary of an individual known by both not only provides the employee with information about the job but also guarantees the employer that she/he is, to a certain extent, appropriate for the vacant post” (2001:94). Engineers and information technologists tend to migrate through foreign embassy programs, headhunters, recruiting organizations, and private migration
consultants (Meyer 2001:101). Meyer explains that these intermediaries have a large influence on moving labor abroad:

These organizational intermediaries are actively putting potential employers into contact with employees at a global level. Evidence shows that these intermediaries do create incentives to move, through all kinds of socio-technical devices for people who, in many instances, did not express a prior intention to leave (Meyer 2001:101).

Like engineers and information technologists, football players move through more institutionalized channels. These channels include football agents and club recruiters.

Economic terms known as supply and demand dictate that the demand of certain skills contributes the most to migration flows reflect the economic needs of the host-country; however, Meyer suggests that evidence demonstrates that the intermediaries between the migrant and employer create the demand for labor:

The very content of supply and demand is shaped by the networks, by their actors and intermediaries. In fact, there is a co-evolution of supply and demand, and networks through which the adjustments occur...the supply of highly skilled manpower is hardly self-declared: it is the result of very active ‘demand carriers’” (2001:103).

One Egyptian agent named Mohammed actively strives to obtain his client’s contracts in Europe and has a transnational professional network, which he actively seeks to expand. “I have some people in Turkey, England, and Belgium. I have sent someone to Ghana to recruit players to bring here [Egypt] for two years and then bring them to Europe. Egypt is the mid-way.” He recently became an agent and has worked hard to expand his network:

Four years ago, I started with unknown players, I tried hard to get some networks outside Egypt. I started to go to London to have meetings there. I am concentrating on how to get Egyptian players outside Egypt. Not all of the [Egyptian] players want to play in Europe they go and then they want to come back.
Egyptians are particularly popular in Belgium, yet it is the agent’s network that created the opening for Egyptian players. It is not a particular nationality that is in demand in Europe, but variable player profiles that managers seek. It is agents who create demand for certain nationalities. It is football club staff that contacts Mohammed inquiring if he has a player that would fit the profile needed by the manager. Mohammed said: “Abroad, yes, managers ask for help from me to bring them players. It is best to see the player in his best condition in Egypt. I tell those interested to come to Egypt instead of flying him out for a tryout.”

The transnational networks that the agent, Mohammed, navigates in order to obtain contracts in Europe are based on his own contacts. Mohammed views Egypt as a nodal point to Europe. Mohammed is purposely seeking to develop foreign players in Egypt in order to eventually find them contracts in Europe. He is also currently trying to create a network in Spain as he explained: “Belgium, Turkey, appreciate players from Egypt. We do not have good relations in England because previous players have messed it up. Saudi Arabia and Germany also like Egyptian players. A small percentage of everything works out. No one is playing in Spain. I have considered studying Spanish to help my career” in order to expand his network and potential markets. Mohammed also represents two West Africans who now play in Europe after having spent time playing in Egypt. He describes Africans as easy and simple in comparison to Egyptian players who according to him, his wife describes as in need of “babysitting” in order for them to adjust to their careers in Europe. African players “are easy. You get them there [Europe] and they do their job.”
Migration Networks in and out of Egypt to Asia and the Americas

As previously noted in chapter two, Mouctar has played in multiple Arab countries. He was recruited while competing in a gulf state. Unlike Mouctar, most African players come to Egypt directly from their home countries. Exceptions like Mouctar, are mostly limited to large successful Egyptian Premier League clubs such as Ahly or Zamalek because they can afford to pay transfer fees. Players recruited beyond their home countries are usually scouted in tournaments around Africa and the Middle East in club and multi-national tournaments. Within the Arab World, including North Africa and the Middle East, players are moved, loaned, and contracted throughout the countries. As the oil-funded building boom of the United Arab Emirates and other Gulf countries expands, so does the development of football infrastructure, leagues, and institutions. The football league in the United Arab Emirates has an increased demand for talented labor and more prominently, star power.

Recently, the captain of the 2006 World Cup Italian winning team, Fabio Cannavaro signed a presumed large figure with Dubai’s Al Ahli in June of 2010 (CNN 2010:1). Because of the Gulf’s vast oil revenues, contracts in the Gulf Countries including the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia offer larger incomes than contracts typically found in Egypt. Migration flows in both direction between Egypt and the Gulf states. Interest in players within Egypt goes beyond Africa, Asia, and Europe. It has expanded to include the importation of labor from Latin America and labor migration to Latin America. One Nigerian player named Napoleon had tried out with an Argentinean club team, which was working to negotiate a loan with his current team in Egypt at the time of interview. In the end, he remained in Egypt.
During the 2009-2010 football season, there were three Brazilian football players playing in the Egypt football league in all divisions. Mouctar moved from Northern Africa to the Gulf and then back to North Africa, where in plays in Cairo. Sports agents and club scouts facilitated his movement across multiple countries.

Other Push and Pull Factors

In the previous chapter I introduced Castro, who migrated to Egypt the encouragement of a Ghanaian agent. He emphasized the fact that playing in same league as Egyptian player Aboutrika\(^8\) influenced his decision in coming to Egypt:

I met a guy who was Ghanaian, who I spoke to. I met him a couple times. He is from Ghana. He is a Ghanaian. Then I spoke to other people that told me like Egypt is good. The football has improved and all that and so making the decision to come to Egypt. It wasn’t a big thing to do because I knew about Aboutrika. Aboutrika is no nono… he is a living legend. Yeah coming here and playing in the same league as Aboutrika, I couldn’t say no, so I came. So Aboutrika I would say he was really part of it. He was like 80% part of the deal. Although I didn’t talk to him, I didn’t know him. Just him being here, playing in Egypt he had inspired me to come.

This Ghanaian agent that Castro met with several times was able to obtain him a contract in Egypt. The sports agent asked Castro if he was interested in playing for an Egyptian team who was thinking about hiring him. As he explained, he obtained references from other players in Egypt about the Egyptian Premier League to make the decision carefully. Despite the strong influence of agents in footballer’s career choices, there are external forces that provide motivation for players to leave, like Aboutrika in Castro’s case.

Independent players are the clearest example of this. Zinedine, Thomas, and Aquib all came to Egypt with no contractual obligations to any club or sports agent.

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\(^8\) Mohammed Aboutrika plays for Al-Ahly and is a member of the Egyptian National Team. He has played in a prominent role in Egypt’s last three consecutive African Cup of Nations. He is a top player in Egypt and African. He is the 2006 CAF player of the year. He has also been named the best player in Egypt fives times (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008).
Thomas migrated to Egypt after talking with some agents in Nigeria. Instead of hiring one of them, he felt it was better to migrate to Egypt independent of an agent. They were influenced by perceptions of the football industry in Egypt by those within their local football industry.

Similar to the “American Dream,” Europe, as a spatial entity, provides imaginations of prosperity, success, and wealth for those within the football world. Those ideas are not far-fetched given the average salary of football players in Western Europe. The success a player could achieve in Europe will directly bring him “home.” Their success will give them the exposure to their country’s football federation that will enable them to be capped or included in the national team for international matches. Playing for one’s home country is “the ultimate dream of football players,” according to Mouctar. In order to play for their home country, such as Ghana or Nigeria, they must play in Europe due to the fact that their national team is very competitive. In order to facilitate the process of going “home,” players use Egypt as nodal point within the global football industry.

Egypt’s reputation in Africa is uniquely prestigious. Many players have told me that the Egyptian national team is the best in Africa, a view confirmed by the Egyptian team’s three consecutive African Nations’ Cup titles since 2006. A Nigerian player named Fred explained to me that Egypt was closer to Europe and therefore, will provide the best access to contracts in Europe in comparison to South Africa, which has a similar industry to Egypt: “I have better chance of going to Europe. If you look at the map it is closer to Europe. Egypt was closer to me than South Africa. Egypt is the best in Africa.”

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9 When a player is assigned to international match for their national team, they are “capped” in reference to when a player used to receive a commemorative cap for each international match played.
The elevated reputation is especially apparent considering that Francophone players could attempt to play professionally in similar conditions in Moroccan or Tunisian clubs, but choose to instead to play in Egypt. Tunisia and Morocco have equal levels of commercialism and development in comparison to Egypt. All three countries have a more profitable football industry than West Africa and provide better salaries to their players. They could easily network without having to learn Arabic and/or English. Many players are usually provided with translators, if they have a contract. However, Egypt is still a larger adjustment. These francophone players choose the harder route. Zinedine is a prime example as he is an independent Guinean player explained to me that he came to Egypt because he will be better trained, as he explains:

It betters us [francophone players] to go here [Egypt] in comparison to Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia. Despite that they have the same system of life and the same manner of practicing football, their [Egyptian] football is somewhat more advanced in comparison to football in Morocco… Here football is a little good. When you leave here [Egypt] with a good training and when you leave to Europe or other championships you should be able to hold your own. Comparatively for example in Morocco or in Tunisia when you leave, you see some gaps; you see some errors to rectify… Comparatively here when you leave it is certain that you are well trained.10

These football players challenge themselves in Egypt, where most football professionals do not even speak English let alone French because they consider the level of play to be best in Egypt. Migration and playing in Egypt is an investment in one’s human capital.

10 Original quote in French: “parce que là on s’est mieux aller ici par rapport au Maroc ou en Algérie ou en Tunisie. Tu vois malgré que ils aient le même système de vie et la même manière de pratiquer le football mais eux leur football soit un peu avancé par rapport de football du Maroc. Tu vois ? Ici le football est un peu bon. Quand tu quittes ici par une bonne formation ici. Quand tu pars en Europe ou que des autres championnats tu dois tenir. Comparativement par exemple au Maroc ou en Tunisie quand tu pars tu vois quelques lacunes tu vois quelques erreurs à rectifier, tu vois ? Comparativement ici quand tu pars c’est sûr que tu es bien formé. Comprends?”

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Some players described leaving home for factors not directly related to football. For example, Thomas described routine violence between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria as a significant factor in his immigration to Egypt. As Thomas described to me: “My dream is to go to Europe. It is very difficult to get to Europe. I cannot go there easily. There was war in the south where I am from in Nigeria; the war was hard. My brother is in the United Kingdom. We are lucky that we survived. I can come to escape to Egypt with hope of going to Europe.”

Lillian Farrell writes: “a cultural competence (such as being able to navigate working and living abroad) derives a scarcity value and yields profits of distinction for its owner” (2010:111). Migration is an investment in human capital, whether in the form of international migration or rural to urban migration. The investment in migration will increase the future monetary income of the migrant (Jauhiainen 2008:98). Some African football players perceive employment abroad as the sole requisite to being a professional football player because it holds such profitability and prestige. By playing abroad, a football player like Napoleon improves his game, but also his marketability. It brings him prestige that he can then leverage to obtain better contracts in the future, whether in Egypt or elsewhere. When I asked Napoleon if he had a choice in coming to Egypt he replied: “Yeah I had a choice. I can decide not to come. But you know I just want to be a professional soccer player. Playing in your country alone is not enough for you. You have to go to certain places to see different coaches and styles of play and to make your CV [Curriculum Vitae] very strong.”

The potential economic benefits of moving to Egypt are enticing. Yet demonstrated above by Napoleon, the investment in human capital through migration is
not solely the immediate economic benefit, but it is also an investment that pays off later after training and competing in Egypt. Considering the Egyptian Premier League is capable of paying its players an average wage of $120,000 per season, a considerable sum for any country, the player has the potential to earn large amounts of income.

With large amounts of poverty in their home countries, football becomes a way out and even a second choice as a career. Football presents a form of economic opportunity that most players are unable to imagine at home in other professions. The lack of available employment and economic instability push many young men to seek a professional football career. A career as a professional footballer is a lifelong passion for some and it is a backup career for others. Young men describe turning to football when their educational opportunities have run dry due to the financial instability or their economic situation is so terrible that even with a bachelor’s degree they have no choice but to become a professional football player. Others speak of football as a stepping-stone to something else they desire.

Fred, who has a bachelor’s degree in accounting, explained to me that he would like to pursue his graduate degree somewhere other than Egypt. In order for him to have economic opportunity at home, he needed to have a degree from abroad. Instead of applying directly to a university in Europe or America, he is choosing to wait until he obtains a football contract in Europe. Football is a stepping-stone to him being able to obtain a master’s degree. The limitations of a student visa in some countries, such as England, would limit one’s access to employment as a foreign national. It would be harder to get by with limited income. A sponsored workers visa would allow a player to continue earning an income as a professional football player and pursue higher education.
at the same time, assuming the player actually had time to juggle both schedules. Fred does not envision time to do both as a problem.

Paul chose to become a football player because he lacked a family member to support him in continuing his education. He had no choice but to pursue a football career in order to pursue higher education and to survive financially. For both Paul and Fred, education and other careers not associated with the football industry are their end and football is merely a source of income towards those ends.

**Labor Arbitrage: Territorialization of Values**

I was traveling in a taxi from the Zamalek island neighborhood to downtown Cairo, as we passed Ahly Football club, my taxi driver called out to a man on the street. It turns out that this man was an injured Egyptian Ahly player who the taxi driver had encouraged to get healthy. It was obvious that he was an Ahly football fan. When I asked what he thought of African players playing in Egypt, he replied: “they are good for football here, but they really should be paid better.”

The market for cheap football labor has increased exponentially since the 1990’s through the relaxing of foreign labor quotas and labor arbitrage of Africans and Latin Americans in Europe. Arbitrage refers to the practice of exploiting price discrepancies between two separate markets by redistributing the lower priced item in higher priced markets (Ong 2010:98). Though arbitrage of items is not new, the arbitrage of labor is. Sports agents profit from price discrepancies between sub-Saharan African and Egypt. These discrepancies are the motivating force behind a sports agents desire to facilitate transnational football labor migration to Egypt. By signing a more expensive contract the agents earns more. They usually earn 10% of a player’s annual salary. Aihwa Ong demonstrates this through the example of Indian laborers in the high tech industry who
are contracted to work in California, at much lower rates than local American hires (2005:160-161).

In addition to agents, teams also take advantage of labor arbitrage because they can save money on their operational costs. Like Asian contract workers in the Silicon Valley, African football players represent a form of labor arbitrage, where their skills of equal level to local footballers are imported to save costs and thus increase profits for football clubs in Europe and other regions, not only through paying the player, less but through trading and lending the player to other teams for a profit.

Smaller clubs in lower divisions or in smaller European countries do not have the fan base or budgets to deal with rising operational costs. They are under a lot of pressure to balance their budgets and resort to importing cheaper labor from abroad (Alegi 2010:98). As Alegi explains:

Under enormous pressure to balance the books and remain competitive, ordinary clubs developed a business strategy focused on cutting costs and generating profits by purchasing inexpensive young talents in Africa (and Latin America) and later reselling them at higher prices on the European Market. The vertiginous growth of African Migration in the second half of the 1990s was incontrovertible: from about 350 in 1996 to 2000 (2010:98).

Labor arbitrage allows companies or football clubs to pay one labor pool less than another. This inexpensive labor pool is typically dislocated geographically, most often in off-shoring (Ing 2006:160). Major European clubs can develop and train labor less expensively through acquiring football clubs and academies in West Africa. The most talented developed labor can also be sold, with great profit to European clubs (Darby et al. :149). Castro has issues with labor arbitrage and blames not only clubs and agents for unequal pay, but the players themselves:

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Some of foreigner African players who come in here... Sometimes they them themselves make, they make we some other Africans cheap... because me for instance if you want to give me a certain money and I don’t want to take it. The team approaches another African player lets say they want to give me 100,000 dollars and I don’t want to take it. I say it’s too small. They approach another African player, the African player will say don’t give me 100,000 dollars, just give me $20,000 and I will do the work for you. So then it makes us always always cheap. And it will not change because the people do not want to change. Their mentality does not want to change, which is wrong. If you know that you are good, and you know how to do the job. If they give you a certain money you say no. This is too small. And they go in for another African player whose as good as you. He also has to say look this money is small. So at least the people will start changing. Their mentality will start changing. Look, we cannot get these people for cheaper anymore because they are good. Because the football player we do more running. We work a lot. We handle the things on the field because that is why they buy us. So we have to understand we have to make the people understand this if this is what we are doing on the field then they have to pay more instead. Because if you bring Merci in to Egypt to play lets say Ahly you can’t give Merci the money you give Aboutrika. Although Aboutrika is a legend, but trust Merci is good.

A player’s desperation to play and to have a contract forces him to cheapen himself according to Castro. After the interview, he told me about a player he had just met who signed a contract with an Egyptian club that gave him a salary of $200 U.S. a year. Football clubs benefit from contracting players at a lower rate than a local player of equal skill in order to balance budget and earn more profit. Hopefully, clubs pay the African player more than what he could make at home; however, the experience of Castro’s acquaintance indicates that this might not always be the case.

Thomas currently earns 200 U.S. dollars a month, which he sees as a good starting wage. I have not been able to find statistics about the average salary of football players in Egypt, both Egyptians and Africans alike have confessed to me that Africans are paid less than Egyptians. This has negative effect on the players who hold out for better pay, who risk losing the potential contract when an equally talented player is willing to sign a contract worth a lesser value. Labor arbitrage is one way in which
agents and football clubs commodify and objectify their players. By networking in a foreign country, sports agents can seek to earn larger amounts of income off a player in Egypt than in Ghana or other West African countries while clubs stand to benefit from lower operational costs.

**Conclusion**

“In football if you have a good agent, then you can reach anywhere you want. If you don’t than you can’t go anywhere. You need a good agent to get a contract... you cannot play otherwise.” –Fred, Ghana

A sports agent is the primary facilitator of football labor migration to Egypt because the agent’s social network enables players to obtain try-outs and are the primary means to which they even consider playing in Egypt. There remain exceptions to this, such as independent players, yet these individuals came because of influences by others in the football industry through the dissemination of information. Without individuals sharing information about Egypt’s football scene, these independent players, like their counterparts who came to Egypt because of a sports agent’s initiative, would have no knowledge of Egypt’s football industry.

The agents objectify these players as a means to their own end, which is to earn money. Labor arbitrage is their means of taking advantage of price discrepancies to earn more, which clubs also seek to extort. These prices discrepancies are based on the territorialized values that change between different space and countries. The importance of player values is discussed in the next chapter.

The concept of human capital theorized by Becker (1975) forms the theoretical base of this chapter. Human capital is the investment in certain processes, such as migration, on the job training, and medical treatment that influences the future monetary income of individuals as a method of improving output (Becker 1975:9). In the Fordist economic system, employers and companies invested in human capital to increase output and instill loyalty to the company. The neoliberal economic system today approaches human capital investment as primarily the responsibility of the individual and not the employer. Loyalty is not expected; labor is very mobile and experiences high turnover. As described in the introduction of this thesis, neoliberalism is made up of ideologies and policies that seek to further expand global capital accumulation “through free trade, financial deregulation, privatization, World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Trade Organization (WTO), and kindred organizations” (Mensah 2008:1).

In an increasingly neoliberal world, sports clubs stand apart as they continue to invest in human capital through on the job training and specialized medical attention. In an industry that promotes and profits from the spectacle of athletic competition, the need for valuable, agile bodies is of the utmost importance. Yet despite the fact that football clubs must invest in their players’ human capital, they must also adapt to a neoliberal world of mobile labor, casualized employee-employer relationships, and capital flows. This chapter seeks to explain the commodification of African football players carried out
by sports clubs and sports agents by using a Marxist definition of a commodity and Becker’s (1975) understanding of human capital.

Although formal FIFA regulations allow for free agency and thus formally seem to diminish the level of commodification, a number of other factors may have led to a proliferation of language and practices treating players as commodities. What is particularly interesting about football players is that they are not only a labor force, but also a commodity, in that the right to hire them is a product that clubs sell to one another. Football players are commodities while under contract, but they cease to retain a commodity-value when they become a free-agent meaning without a contract. There are managers, medical staff, and other club staff that work to shape the final product, which includes improving the output of football labor. The relationship between the final product and the football player is peculiar because a football player simultaneously creates and comprises part of the commodity produced. The commodity they are producing for public consumption is the football match in and of itself, which is a commercialized endeavor that produces a consumable product. Pierre Bourdieu’s (1998) theory of the commercialization of football in Europe postulates that football is no longer solely played, but is similar to a concert. Football is performed as a spectacle, as a consumable commodity. By simultaneously providing labor and being the product of this labor and the labor of club staff, a football player becomes a large monetary and human capital investment that football clubs try to exploit in hope of gaining surplus value from the player in the football labor trade markets. This results in the commodification of the football player.
Invoking Karl Marx in the context of football, the player, like other commodities, has an exchange-value and the use-value of the player. The player’s body is the site of value. It is not only a means of production, but it is a resulting commodity. Football players, sports clubs, and sports agents actively try to increase the worth of the use-value and exchange-value. These two values are improved upon through investing in human capital. Agents and clubs improve the human capital and use-value of a football player through age falsification, medical treatment, and training.

**Investments in Human Capital**

Before continuing it needs to be explained that an African football player is not commodified in every sense of the word. They are not slaves despite how controlled their lives will appear to be in chapter five. The players I interviewed have a degree of agency and autonomy. In fact since the 1980’s and 1990’s, players have become less commodified than they were before unrestricted free agency. This is in direct contrast with the commodifying regimes implemented by neoliberalism to find profit in previously unknown markets such as the football industry itself and for-profit educational institutions. Regulations implemented by FIFA in the 1980s and the 1990s and the Bosman ruling relaxed laws, loosening controls on mobility and employment. The Bosman ruling created free agency between European Union member states at the completion of a player’s contract, which gave him the right to contract with any team, ending the retention system that had allowed teams to charge a transfer fee after a player’s contract had expired. In addition, individual national associations have relaxed their foreign player quotas, England has completely deregulated their labor market,
ending all foreign players quotas. Egypt has a far more restrictive policy of three foreign players per team.

Both Karl Marx’s concept of commodification and Gary Becker’s idea of human capital developed under different circumstances than the present global economic system and how they are used in this thesis. Neither of them completely foresaw neoliberalism as both theories predate its existence. Furthermore Marx and Becker’s theories neither share the same framework nor come from the same discursive angles. Marx is economic historian and theorist while Becker is a liberal economist. By drawing upon both of their approaches and applying them to a neoliberal context, I am able to understand why football clubs invest in human capital while also negotiating the neoliberal global economic system.

The Marxist definition of a commodity is something that is “in the first place, an object outside us, a thing by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another” (Marx 1906:41). A commodity has many aspects. These include a use-value, which is the utility of the commodity, an exchange-value, which is the worth of a commodity in exchange for other goods, and lastly a price, which is the monetary exchange-value (Marx 1901:42-6). Commodification is the process by which an object, services, or something traditionally neither a good nor service (such as human beings or the environment) is given value within these intrinsic aspects described above (Polyani 2004:4). One term I do not take from Marx’s work on labor and commodities is his notion of “value”, which he defined as how much human labor is involved in producing the commodity (Marx 1901:42). If the word “value” is used in this thesis, it refers to its
general sense within the English language or the two Marxian categories discussed above.

Investments in human capital are part of the commodification process by which certain investments lead to greater future monetary income of the individual players as well as their football agents and football clubs. A larger monetary-value and use-value are the most beneficial to all of these parties. An increased exchange-value is a source of potential profits for the sports club. An increased use-value will reflect in a future higher wage for the player, a higher commission for his sports agent, and a more efficient employee for the football club. Below are the three forms of human capital investment that appeared in my research: age falsification, medical support, and on the job training provided by the coaching staff.

**Pretending to be Younger**

“Africans in general from east to west, if you want to survive if you want to survive, you have to neglect... the origin of your life [Castro laughing in the background] to pack it aside and open another chapter.” - Martin, from Ghana

Sub-Saharan African players have been involved in their local (African) football scene for years. Many start off in local clubs and football academies. Through games and competitions, they find exposure. As previously explained in chapter three, local sports agents are the primary contacts that influence footballers to journey to Egypt. Local agents attract potential athletes by convincing them that Egypt maintains better football salaries and a higher level of play that could afford them a prosperous football career as well as exposure, which could enable them to obtain contracts in Europe. As Martin is quoted saying above, there is this idea among some players and sports agents that football players have “to start over” when they come to Egypt. “To start over” they falsify their ages in order to appear younger. Because of preconceived notions of ageism
in Egypt, African football players are encouraged, if not forced, by their agents to change all of their documents including passports, birth certificates, and other forms of identification before departing home. When I asked Martin why he changed his age, he replied: “just to catch up on the situation…my agent told me to change it because if I am old if I am older I cannot come. To [be] professional you have to be young in order to come [to Egypt].”

Agents working in players’ home countries encourage or as in the case of Martin’s agent even require age falsification because they believe that in Egypt younger players are more marketable. Players adopt the same belief as the agent such as the case for Ricky who explained the reasons for age falsification as: “they do not like big age; they like small age. It is not the same age in Ghana. I have fake documents. Before you do [obtain] passports, you have to change everything of yours, so everything is consistent.” In addition to Ricky and Martin, Zinedine as well as Thomas and several of his friends who I had met at the birthday party for a young Nigerian girl directly admitted to me or insinuated that they all had documents that falsified their age. Zinedine was the first player to inform me of age falsification practices by asking me if I wanted his real age or his football age when I asked him how old he was. I then asked Zinedine what exactly he meant:

My football player age is eighteen years, but I really am twenty-five years old. Why? Because imagine that I am twenty-five years old. It is high in regards to football. You see? The moment you see me, do you see me as twenty-five years old? No, so it is a little that, I cannot say I am twenty-five years old, the moment of departure, from the moment I leave for here [Egypt]. It is not good for me. It is not only here. In Europe, they do it. In South America it is done. It is done all around the world. You see? Even here they do it. You see? It is a secret, we do
not tell everyone. It is impossible. But now since 1 February, I have been eighteen years old. 11

Unlike Zinedine who indicates that he changed his age to below 18 years of age, most change their age to eighteen years old. FIFA legislation restricts the movement and employment of minors, therefore it is not advantageous to falsify below the age of eighteen. Zinedine continued on to ask me to look at him and see if I could tell how old he was. He believed he looked eighteen years old. I was unable to determine if he was older. He also said that age falsification was highly secretive and that the clubs were not aware of this trend. However as quoted above, Zinedine made it seem that age falsification is common practice outside of Africa as well. If it is so common, team managers must be aware. In addition, club medical staff must notice differences in skeletal development and other indicators of age since an eighteen-year-old male has most likely not finished puberty and still has the possibility to grow up until one’s early twenties. Whether they truly care would probably depend on the club’s circumstances.

The issue of age falsification has been discussed on a junior national team level such as U-18 and U-20 teams in Nigeria and has been sited as hindering the development of football in Africa (see: Olulana 2011; RNW Africa Desk 2009; African Soccer Union 2010b). Age falsification on national teams could result in penalties from FIFA against the players and federations. These same players play in professional leagues with an

11 Original quote in French: “Mon âge de jouer est 18 ans... mais j’ai vraiment 25. Pourquoi ? Parce que imagine-toi que je dis vingt-cinq ans mon âge est comment? C’est élevé en matière de football? Tu vois ? Le moment quand tu me vois est-ce que tu peux me voir comme vingt-cinq ans. Non. Donc c’est un peu ça quoi, je ne peux pas dire que j’ai vingt-cinq ans le moment de départs, le moment je pars pour ici. C’est pas bon pour moi... Ça c’est pas seulement ici. En Europe ça ce fait. En Amérique de sud ce fait. Ce fait partout au monde. Tu vois ? Même ici ça ce fait. Tu vois ? C’est un secret on ne le dit pas à tout le monde. C’est impossible. Mais maintenant en 1 février, j’avais 18 ans.”
incorrect age. Based on my research, age falsification within football leagues has yet to be addressed by the media or the industry.

In contradiction to what agents believe in West Africa, Egyptian football agents Mohammed and Ehab explained to me that age is not important, it is a player’s skill that will get him the position, like other forms of employment. This remains true in many instances as clubs continue to hire and pay transfer fees for contracted players instead of waiting for a player’s contract to end or hiring someone else. These transactions of players take place within the labor trade markets, which I discuss later in this chapter. What is interesting about these players who falsified their ages is that none of them were club-recruited. All of them were either agent-assisted or independent players who obviously were influenced by agents and others in Africa to change their age. Agents and individual players perpetrate age falsification not football clubs. This demonstrates how Mohammed and Ehab are partially correct that age is irrelevant. Yet to clubs that are financially strapped, agents who want a better chance of earning a commission, and players who want to extend their career, it is most relevant.

What perhaps the players, Ehab, and Mohammed have overlooked is the logic behind hiring younger players. Economically they are advantageous. Younger players have a longer and more durable use-value and exchange-value as a commodity. They are cheaper than older athletes. As well as being a competitive investment, players are an economic investment. Although they may not be as skilled as an older player, younger players still have time to develop or “peak” to be a better player. Therefore, the use-value of a younger player is less upfront, but in the long-term, the player will gain a large differential commodity-value than an older player as long as the player is not injured.
According to Becker (1975), increases in wages affect the younger workforce more so than older, trained professionals because the younger workforce is less trained and therefore is less efficient and less paid. The younger the employee, the steeper the earning curve of the individual because the return on training is collected at later ages (Becker 1975:23). The investment will gain a larger differential-value in comparison to an older player. The older player has more human capital, thus a larger salary and greater output, but has a shorter shelf life; therefore older players have less time to gain the same difference in exchange-value than a younger player. Falsifying one’s age is part of the process of the player’s commodification because it improves the ability to sell the player through perceived future differentials between signing the player, human capital investment, and selling the player within the labor trade markets.

**Improving Human Capital Through Training**

Training takes place for most teams six days a week unless there is a match. Like the rest of Egypt, Friday is a day off. Most of the Christian players interviewed attend church on Fridays, while their Egyptian teammates spend the day with their families. With the exception of the Egyptian league’s breaks, training occurs even in the hot months of summer and during the holy month of Ramadan. Trainings and matches occur in the late evening during Ramadan after Iftar dinner or in the very early morning everyday. The leagues do not change their playing schedules based on Ramadan. Actually in terms of football, it blossoms during Ramadan. There are organized neighborhood competitions that last till the early hours of the morning everyday. In the colder months, practice takes place during the afternoons. A player’s day is centered around practice also known as training.
An average workday for footballers in Egypt starts in the early afternoon. They tend to wake up in the late morning as they go to bed very late. The player then attends practice. Like other sports and teams, Egyptian clubs employ teams of coaching staff that are headed by a team manager. Assistant coaches have specializations such defense or conditioning while the team manager has the most authority. It is not uncommon in the Egyptian Premier League to find foreign coaching staff on club rosters. Ahly and Zamalek have employed numerous foreign team managers over the years. The coaching staff communicates with their players through interpreters and many of the players have noted that languages differences are never an obstacle for them when taking direction from staff. It was said to me more than once that football is its own language and language differences do not hamper training.

After practice, the players return home and spend hours watching football matches on television. Except for practice, training, and a little Internet surfing, Castro spends most of his day watching football on TV. “Sometimes life gets boring,” he said. My interviewees are heavy consumers of football; they spend countless hours in front of the television, watching matches via satellite. The team manager uses his own techniques during training to get his best out of his players. He also tries control the behavior of his players off the field, which is addressed in chapter five, but needs to be explained here in the context of human capital. Egyptians team managers set large restrictions of player mobility and social lives in order to produce what they believe is a better labor force. The relationship between sub-Saharan football players and their team manager is often

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12Team manager like in American baseball is the head coach.
filled with a certain amount of resentment on the part of the players because of these rules of conduct off the field. It is these rules that make their lives after practice feel boring.

**Maintaining Human Capital Through Medical Services**

In addition to coaching staff, the club hires medical staff to treat player injuries and attend to their overall health. Club staff are investments in human capital for teams as they improve use-values and maintain the product. Clubs in Egypt, however, pay little attention to the psychological needs and social health of their players.

Becker distinguishes outside job investments as mostly physical and emotional health, which is just as important to increasing the output of the workforce as on the job investments such as job trainings.

A decline in the death rate of working ages may improve earning prospects by extending the period during which earnings are received; a better diet adds strength and stamina, and thus earning capacity; or an improvement in working conditions-higher wages, coffee breaks, and so on-may affect morale and productivity (Becker 1975:40-41).

Healthcare is just as important within the football industry as training. Without physically agile bodies, the clubs are unable to compete and thus unable produce their product.

Regrettably, football clubs in Egypt do not perceive emotional health as an important determinant of productivity and wage determination. The most evident example of this for African football players in Egypt is club restrictions on their social lives, including interaction with women. This subject of limiting interactions with the opposite sex is thoroughly addressed in the next chapter, but needs to be understood here in the context of psychological health coupled with the lack of nurturing social lives of players.
Limitations on interactions with women coupled with a lack of a nurturing social life affects the happiness of the individual players and judging by what my interviewees told me, is an impediment to the use-value of the player as a commodity. It would be misleading to say that these restrictions on these player’s lives are solely the result of the club’s disciplinary code. They are also reflective of Egyptian cultural norms that player would encounter without the surveillance of football clubs. My interviewees perceive these club and cultural restrictions as hurtful to their productivity. Fred describes below the negative impact of club restrictions:

They [management] want you to concentrate on football all the time; you cannot just live like that… I go home from training. You cannot go anywhere; we do not have anyplace to go. I do not have much of a social life. To become the best player you need to be happy, their culture we do not like it. You cannot talk to a woman; you cannot date a woman because the culture limits you from interacting with them. They cannot expect you to play well all the time if you are unhappy and you cannot even be in a relationship.

Perhaps one of the most common themes among contracted football players is the lack of a social life. Even though they admit to having friends, they also admit to not socializing often. Paul and Maleek during their interview told me they do not hang out with friends often. They spend the majority of their free time at home on the computer or watching football matches. Martin complained that he and others have nowhere else to go but home, that there is “no chilling place.” Other African players complained of a lack of public space where they can socialize and hang out. Charles states: “I go to practice. After practice, I stay at home because I do not know where to go. I watch television and chat with friends. Anytime I am free and there is a game, I watch it.” When I asked Charles, what he thought of Egypt, he hesitated and then replied: “It is a good place to live, but you never leave your home because it is not your country…In Nigeria, I do not stay home and I go out in my country everything is free for me.” Football players change
their behavior in Egypt in order to adapt. Their change in lifestyle is an investment in human capital because it prevents them from being fined. Yet this change in lifestyle and control has psychological implications that they feel degrades their human capital.

**Surplus Value: Commodification and Labor Trade Markets**

*The agents make moves you have to work hard here to move on. Manager wants to sign me to stay here to trade me. They we want me to stay in Egypt.* —Paul, *country withheld*

David Beckham and Thierry Henry accepted large figure contracts at the end of their careers in clubs in a rather obscure football league from a European perspective. Major League Soccer (MLS) in the United States with the aid of sports giants such as Nike and Adidas have started to import star labor from Europe in hopes of drawing attention to football in the United States. Both Beckham and Henry have had long successful club and national team careers. Their bodies are worth millions of dollars in terms of endorsement deals, use-value, exchange-value, and salary. They are not just human beings, but have become brands. Clubs, companies, and these players willingly commodify these two bodies in exchange for monetary reward. Commodification is the process by which something such as an object or even a person is given certain values that makes it become a commodity. Many times the commodification of the human body through economic exchanges is masked as something else through social constructions such as endorsement deals (Scheper-Hughes 2002:2). The body becomes a tradable, stolen, and sold object that can be divided into parts, for instance the black market sales of kidneys (Scheper-Hughes 2002:1).

The commodification of the football players exists through the economic organization of global professional football. The players are not only human resources, but also an investment in financial capital for football clubs. The quality of a player’s
performance determines his monetary exchange-value through speculations. The player’s price becomes real when the under-contract player is transferred to another team: “When this occurs, the buyer club has to pay an indemnity to the seller one” (Poli 2005:2). The player thus becomes a commodity when exchanged between clubs.

As referenced multiple times in this thesis the changes in FIFA legislation during the 1980s and the Bosman ruling in 1995 created vast changes to global football industry. The most important legislation in context of commodification was the Bosman ruling that created free agency for players in Europe. Free agency has actually allowed for sub-Saharan football players to be less commodified in this sense than they used to be. Before the Bosman ruling and introductions of free-agency within other football associations, football clubs maintained rights to players even after their contract had expired. Players were forced to negotiate a new contract with their former club or find a team willing to pay an indemnity after their contract had finished. With the introduction of free agency, clubs no longer have any rights to football players after a contract has expired. These changes facilitated mobility and migration of football labor. Yet indemnities still remain if players are under contract. Often it is not in the interest of a football club to wait till a player’s contract has finished to hire an individual. Football is a business that depends on agile fit labor at all moments. A club will pay indemnities for players because they will provide the skill and potential they need and perhaps the star power, which may no longer be at its peak if they wait until the contract has expired. As said recently players are economic and competitive investments. A competitive successful club will experience hirer economic reward by attracting more fans and commercial income that comes with a larger fan base and success in competition.
A contract on average lasts two years or two league seasons when a sub-Saharan player signs with an Egyptian team. The players who have played for multiple teams in Egypt also have had contracts lasting two years with each team. I have not heard of any contracts lasting less than two years in Egypt. Yet there are reports within the media of longer contracts negotiated between players and clubs such as Edet Otobong who reportedly signed a four-year contract with Ittihad (African Soccer Union 2010:1). A player is more likely to be traded or “bought” when they are peaking in their performance because they have a higher exchange-value, which will motivate a club to part with a certain player. Yet the quality or greatness needed in a player’s peak is circumstantial based on where they are playing and where the interested club is also located within the global economic system. Manchester United competes within a highly developed league and the core of the industry. The club can afford to employ the top players from around the world whereas Ahly does not have the capital to employ a similar player. Therefore the players, Ahly would “buy” have most likely a less developed skill-set than a player being “bought” by Manchester United. Though this player might have peaked in some senses, they are not as skilled as a player employed by Manchester United. Ahly’s player has the chance to be as skilled in the future, but when “bought” or sign by Ahly, he does not.

As demonstrated in the previous chapter, for a player to move between clubs, it is a complex process that involves a lot of intermediaries negotiating on the players behalf and between the two respected clubs. From what I observed from player movement within Egypt as well as in and out of Egypt, for a player to be “bought,” there has to be a sizable indemnity paid to the player’s club. The new standout players usually garner
interest from multiple clubs, which allows for his club to hold out for the highest indemnity possible. If the club believes they are able to obtain a larger indemnity than offered, they will wait, which almost creates a bidding war over the player.

These indemnities also known as transfer fees are not as high as European records, but they are still significant amounts of capital especially when compared to the average salaries in Egypt and the world. Manchester United traded to Real Madrid Portuguese player Cristiano Ronaldo for a world record of eighty-million British Sterling (Wilson 2009:1). To give an idea of indemnities within, to, and from Egypt, I will share some of the transfer fees quoted from the press. Cameroonian Edet Otobong was transferred from a club in Syria for $300,000 to the Egyptian Premier League club, Ittihad. In his first season he earned a salary of $80,000 (African Soccer Union 2010a:1). By mid season of the 2010-2011 Egyptian Cup, he had the second highest number of points in the league. His success drew attention from multiple football suitors including Ismaily who made a formal offer, which Ittihad rejected. In June 2011, Ittihad traded Otobong to a Sudanese team, Al Hilal for a reported $841,000 (Farouk 2011:1). According to Ahmed Morsey (2008), Wigan Athletic a British football club offered Zamalek FC a considerable amount of money for Egyptian player Amr Zaki in 2008:

Wigan will pay a loan fee of 1,250,000 Euros plus 400,000 Euros with an option to sign the player at the end of the loan period for an agreed transfer fee less than the amount already paid by Wigan to Zamalek. The English club also agreed to pay 500,000 to Zamalek if the player scores 10 Premier League goals for Wigan during the loan spell (1).

Probably the most beloved Egyptian goalie, Essam Al Hadary was traded from Zamalek to a club in Khartoum, Sudan for $700,000 in late 2010 (MTN Football 2010:1). Hadary’s migration is unique in that he travels from the semi-periphery to the periphery.
In exchange for indemnity paid to their home club, Mouctar, Paul, Napoleon, Charles, and Castro were transferred to various Egyptian clubs. Castro and the others had no control over whether their team and the Egyptian club would come to an agreement. Castro’s Egyptian club paid an indemnity or as Castro explained that the club “bought” him.

It is through the transaction. There was someone. There were a couple of guys. Um I met someone who called me from Ghana. Someone called me from Ghana. He told me about a team he had in Egypt and if I was interested. The football there [in Egypt] is a certain higher level so. As he signed a new contract, be became subject the new club’s control over movement, which can keep him in Egypt longer than he would want. Players who did not go through this process when signing with an Egyptian team will be subject to it while under contract.

All the African football players I interviewed in Egypt except Martin want to play in Europe, and several have received offers or interest, but their contracts to Egyptian clubs often prevent them from fulfilling their dream of playing in Europe. As long as players maintain contracts with Egyptian clubs, it is the club’s decision on whether trading or loaning a particular player to a European club or elsewhere is in the best interest of the club. It is only after the approval of their club that a player may accept the offer of a club in Europe. Zinedine explains below the rights of the club has over a player:

Well, if I have a contract here, I cannot quit my contract and go to Europe to play. It is not good because when I do that, I risk them following me. My club here would leave to locate me in another club in Europe. So it is a problem … so it will sanction me. I can runaway. I quit my club and I leave but it is not for playing... If I stay there in Europe, I do not play anymore. I do other things, but
one time that I play, my name is immediate. Everyone knows me now. My club here [in Egypt] is going to say that we know this player here, it is my player.\textsuperscript{13} What Zinedine does not explain is the penalty of breaking FIFA rules if players break contract with a club to play on another. FIFA ordered Egyptian National goalie Essam Al Hadary and Swiss club FC Sion to pay a fine of $796,500 to Ahly in Egypt because FIFA found that Al Hadary’s move to Switzerland had broken FIFA regulations (Abd El Rasoul 2011:1).

In the case of one player, he was unable to leave his club in Egypt because his club and a club in Argentina were unable to come to an agreement on trade fees. He explained that ultimately the Egyptian club has the most control over where he goes as long as he is under contract with them.

I have to decide to go to Argentina. It depends on the relationship between the clubs. I have had other offers to play elsewhere, including in Holland and Belgium. The club has a lot of control where I go. They have the most control because you have a contract with them so they will decide if it is no good for them than they say no, or if they need your service more than they will say no. That is what happened to most of time. My contracts are every two years.

What makes football players a unique commodity is that their status as a commodity is dependent upon their employment. Commodities have a fluid commodity-value that changes based on multiple circumstances, yet it usually always continues to have some form of value. To have a commodity-value, a sub-Saharan football player has to be under contract with a team during a transfer window. A club is only responsible for paying an indemnity to the player’s previous team if a player is under contract. In contrast, a free agent is someone without contractual obligations to any football club.

\textsuperscript{13} Original quote in French: Bon, si j’ai une contrat ici, je peux pas quitter mon contrat et partir en Europe à jouer. C’est pas bon parce que quand je fait ça Il risque de me suivre. Mon club ici va partir me chercher dans un autre club en Europe. Donc c’est un problème... Donc Il va me sanctionner. Tu comprends? Je peux fuir, je quitte mon club et je pars mais ce n’est pas pour jouer. Je ne peux pas. Si je reste là bas en Europe Je ne joue plus. Je fait autre chose, mais une fois que je joue, mon nom est immédiatement. Tout le monde me connais maintenant mon club ici va dire on connais le joueur-là c’est mon joueur.
Thus a free agent has no commodity-value and cannot be bought as Castro was quoted saying in the introduction of this thesis. Despite the fact that a player loses his commodity-value when becoming a free-agent, football players are still commodities because the most valuable players are likely to have contracts that span their most valuable years such as Edet Otobong who had a four year contract with Ittihad when he started to break out and increase his commodity-value. A player’s value to the club actually corresponds to the transfer-value during this period of high success.

To avoid Egyptian club management, Mohammed, an agent I interviewed, moves his players to Europe after their contract finishes. He normally waits till the contract becomes expired to secure their departure abroad more easily. Therefore, the clubs cannot profit from the transaction and thus have no say on whether the player will travel abroad or not. These contracts make players unique commodities because the player only retains a commodity-value while under contract, which usually lasts between two to four years. Upon the completion of a contract, a player can negotiate a new contract with their existing club or another organization.

Players are also traded within the Egyptian football industry. Egypt not only serves as a nodal point between home and Europe or elsewhere in Napoleon’s case, but also has its own interior football labor trade market. About four of the players I interviewed have played on at least two teams in Egypt. It maintains its own hierarchy that foreign players can scale in order to reach better contracts, including those in Europe. Players that excel in the second tier teams can be traded up to the Premier League. They also have opportunities through relegation and promotion to move up to the Premier League with their club at the same time. Like transactions with European clubs, contracts
with buy-out clauses force clubs seeking the player to pay an indemnity to his current football club. Despite the fact that football players are less commodified than they used to be, football teams continue to see them as commodities. Mohammed told me that because he moves his clients abroad, he does not have a good rapport with club teams in Egypt: “I am not in a good relation with teams here [in Egypt] because I take their players.” He went on to explain that it is harder to work within the Egyptian football labor trade market because managers view him as a threat to the stability of their teams due to his work within the international trade market. Also as previously stated Mohammed purposely tries to move players after their contract expires, which means the previous club loses out on income from a transfer fee. The fact that team managers hold grudges against Mohammed demonstrates that clubs continue to view players as commodities.

The fact that players are viewed as commodities is indicative in the lexicon used by players to describe the process of contractual trade negotiations between clubs. As referenced in the introduction of this thesis, Castro described football players as being bought: “Some of the coaches, they look at your CVs and your DVDs and then they invite you for a try-out…Some of them look at it and they buy you straight away.” Football players are more “bought” than they have been in the past because as mentioned in the previous chapter and the introduction of this thesis, regulations implemented by FIFA and the European Union coupled with sports agents who took advantage of these new rulings, football labor migration has gradually increased since the 1980s and in the mid-1990s, the European football industry experienced an imported football labor boom. Perhaps, the commodification and neoliberalization of football has led such terms as
“bought” to be adopted into people’s everyday speech. However as there is no previous literature to contrast this linguistic pattern with and players have previously been bought and traded (just not as frequent today) prior to neoliberalism, it can only be hypothesized that perhaps neoliberalism’s tendency to put everything in terms of market transactions has lead players like Castro to adopt economic expressions within their vocabulary.

In addition to lexicon and reactions to player movement, is the objectification of the players. Inherent in the act of commodification is objectification and subject making of players through control mechanisms such as surveillance, which are used to control the players into behaving in certain way that is acceptable by the clubs and Egyptian cultural practices. These mechanisms of control are discussed in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Football clubs and football agents actively invest in human capital. These investments are a means of creating a better player that is more profitable monetarily and performs better physically on the field. Within the periphery and semi-periphery, football industries serve as locales of talent development that feed more profitable markets in Europe. However this labor distribution can also been seen between the periphery and the semi-periphery as in the case of Egypt. The football labor transfer market allows these clubs to recoup investments and potentially profit from the creation of surplus value upon trading the player. According to FIFA’s formal rules players are treated more as free agents and less as commodities. Yet players are still objectified by clubs through controlling mechanisms. In the next chapter, I discuss disciplinary measures used by Egyptian clubs to control and shape player behavior in relation to Foucault’s definition of objectification, subjectivity, and his theory of discipline and punish.
All the African players I interviewed had severely limited social lives due to stringent club rules. Of all the players I met, Henry’s life was the most controlled and restricted. He told me that he could be fined for meeting with me not because I was a researcher, but because I was not his wife; he was forbidden from having interactions with me or other women. When I apologized for putting him at risk of punishment by his team manager\(^\text{14}\), he quickly replied that I had no need to apologize and that I had made his week. I was a complete change from his lack of social life. He tended to stay at home when he was not at work. Other times Henry just rode the metro alone to explore Cairo to pass the time. He was so restricted by his manager that he was unable to enter certain public spaces, such as restaurants or concert venues, where he could have been “seen.” He had to be careful of what public spaces he engaged in his everyday life. Other players like Martin are subject to certain rules of conduct set by the team manager. They are also subject to disciplinary punishment if they break these rules.

I interpret the discipline of players as a form of objectification. Despite the fact that the neoliberal agenda has actually reduced a player’s formal regulated commodification, the institution of the Egyptian club has not reduced his objectification. The neoliberal reforms that have given African players more individual freedom in their choices to choose employers as free agents do not correlate to the amount of individual

\(^{\text{14}}\) In football discursive tradition, the manager is what in American football lexicon would mean a coach. The manager is responsible for deciding the team line up, and setting disciplinary rules, and running team practices.
freedom a player experiences in their private life in Egypt. Neoliberalism appears to promote individual freedom, but in reality it is pro-business and tends to give priority to corporations over individuals because business provides the capital individuals earn and consume. The player’s loss of a commodity-value upon the expiration of their contract has not changed the way clubs view players in Egypt. I cannot argue that neoliberalism is completely responsible for the objectification of these players since there is precedent for controlling treatment in other leagues and professional sports. What can be said is that despite regulation that afforded football players more rights to their choice of employer, club management still perceives their players as objects and commodities, but within a different economic situation in addition to a cultural situation that makes Egypt unique in its subjectification. This situation is representative of the tension between neoliberalism hypocritical stance on individual freedom and pro-business ideology.

This chapter draws upon Foucault’s (1994) understanding of subject formation through objectification. The word “subject” has two meanings according to Foucault; a person that is “subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge” (Foucault 1994:331). Subjectivity is inseparable from regimes of power. Being subject to a club in Egypt and a global neoliberal regime creates a unique subjective experience for sub-Saharan players in Egypt and Africa. This chapter explores a player’s subjective experience and objectification in relation to club rules and dominance in formulating their subjectivity. Sub-Saharan football players are subject to club management through a system of controlling surveillance and “unequal gaze” in alignment with Foucault’s (1995) interpretation of the panopticon within his book Discipline and Punish. Players like
Martin are forced to adapt their personality and lifestyle to meet the manager’s expectations. They are dependent upon their manager for approval and income, and are controlled by him through disciplinary techniques. This chapter theorizes that the institution of the club objectifies sub-Saharan football players by transforming them into subjects through discipline and surveillance.

**Power, Coaching Staff, and Subjectification**

Kelly and Waddington’s (2006) research on football managerial disciplinary measures relied upon Max Weber’s (1964) understanding of three forms of authority: traditional, rational legal, and bureaucratic. They describe football manager’s exercise of authority as an instance of what Weber called traditional authority, meaning a club manager is not limited by a set of consistent rules, as someone exercising bureaucratic authority would be. As its name suggests, traditions partially encompass traditional authority, which “define the context of commands and the objects and extent of authority…Secondly, tradition leaves a certain sphere of action open for the leader’s free personal decision” (Kelly and Waddington 2006:159). In contrast to Kelly and Waddington, I am looking at how these clubs and the club managers objectify players. I perceive the power and control of a manager as an institutionalized power that objectifies players.

Objectification that exists in everyday life is a form of power that creates the subject. Human beings are transformed into subjects by two different modes of objectification as Foucault explains below:

This form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects. There are two
meanings of the word ‘subject’: subject to someone else by control and
dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both
meanings suggest a form of power that subjugates and makes subject to (Foucault

Sub-Saharan players are subject to a manager and clubs rules through control and
dependence. Players’ experiences of subjectivity are inseparable from the regimes of
power and knowledge such as club institutions that shape, enable, and restrict them. To
understand how they are subjectified, one must first examine clubs rules and methods of
discipline.

**Club Rules**

You must not go to clubs. You must not flirt with sluts. You must not go to the
press.¹⁵ – Mouctar, Côte d’Ivoire

There is punishment if you are late. Sometimes they fine you. We cannot talk to
the media and must have affiliation with the Egyptian federation. – Fred, Ghana

In the quotations above, Mouctar and Fred explain the general rules that they must
follow to be in good stead with the manager and club officials. These rules include no
tardiness, do not talk to the press, do not flirt with women, and do not go with clubs and
other varying venues. The rules create spatial dichotomies that are circumstantial based
on the presence of certain types of bodies, such as women and journalists. For instance,
going to a café with your male friend is acceptable, but going with a female who is not
your wife is unacceptable. Certainly your home also contains restrictions whereby
female bodies are also prohibited. Managers also designate certain spaces off limits; the
most prominent, at least in the minds of football players, are dance clubs, which exist in

¹⁵Original quote in French: “Il ne faut pas aller en boîte. Il ne faut pas flirter avec des putes. Il ne faut pas aller au presse.”
multiple forms in Cairo. From upper class, trendy expensive hot-spots to old downtown belly dancing bars to Africana where a large number of Black Africans and a curious foreign expat population dance until the early hours of the morning. These spaces are perceived negatively by management, thus forbidden because they contain alcohol, single women, and in some cases prostitutes. Other locations, such as modern concert venues have also been designated as off limits in some cases. Interaction between women and football players are restricted within team functions and player’s social lives in Egypt.

*Limitations on Interactions with Women*

What stands Egypt apart from previous research on managerial control and other leagues is the lengths at which clubs attempt to prevent socialization and interaction with female bodies. This is not only a reflection of the fear of female sexuality, but also reflexive of the Egyptian cultural context that differentiates it from other sports leagues. The female body and sexuality has long been seen as having a corrupting and tarnishing power over men. Sport is a clear example. As recently as the 2010 World Cup, the British Press reported that Spanish fans had blamed Sara Carbonero, sportscaster for the television station Telecinco, for Spain’s upsetting loss to Switzerland during the group stage of the World Cup finals (Mackey 2010:1). The Guardian reported that Carbonero, the girlfriend of Spanish goalkeeper Iker Casillas, distracted Casillas by her presence on the football pitch. Furthermore, the Guardian explained that Spanish fans feared she would distract the team before the 2010 World Cup had begun. Her presence and beauty were claimed to have destabilized the team (Ashdown 2010:1). Graham Keeley of the Times of London stated that Carbonero “has been voted sexiest journalist in the world. It was she, the fans insisted, who had sapped the strength of Spain’s goalkeeper and caused
him to fluff what seemed an easy shot” (Mackey 2010:1). She later replied that these reports were nonsense. The Spanish press also criticized the British press for reporting such fallacy, claiming that the British media had not substantiated its claims with verified evidence that fans were upset at Carbonero (Mackey 2010:1).

Among teams from various parts of the world, the fear of women’s sexuality tainting the game of football and other sports has long been ritualized during the pre-match team retreat to the team’s hotel. The superstition excludes women from pre-game ritual in order to prevent their sexuality from “polluting” the team (Armstrong and Giulianotti 1997:10). This also occurs in other sports in prevention of female contamination (Caudwell 2009:267). Mary Douglas explained that discourses about sexual danger and pollution usually include male endangerment by females:

There are beliefs that each sex is a danger to the other through contact with sexual fluids. According to other beliefs only one sex is endangered by contact with the other, usually males from females . . . Such patterns of sexual danger can be seen to express symmetry or hierarchy. It is implausible to interpret them as expressing something about actual relations of the sexes. I suggest that many ideas about sexual dangers are better interpreted as symbols of the relation between parts of society, as mirroring designs of hierarchy or symmetry, which apply in the larger social system. (1966:14)

Like in European football and professional sports teams in the United States, Egyptian football teams also have the pre-game ritual, which requires the entire team retreating to a hotel for the night. On the day prior to game day, a player wakes early to go to practice and an intense day of game preparation. The team then travels to the hotel, which they call “camp.” The hotel can be in the city where the match is or their home base. One Cairo team goes to a hotel in Ain Sokna, a Red-Sea resort for Egypt’s elite an hour outside of Cairo when competing in Cairo. Once arriving at the hotel, the team has dinner together at the hotel. Afterwards, the team reviews team videos of their own and
of the opposing team in order analyze their offensive and defensive objectives. They are restricted to their rooms by a set time. For Napoleon, the pre-game hotel ritual takes place in this order:

Yeah we stay in a hotel when we have the match, we have to be there at seven o’clock we have dinner. We have a meeting at ten to watch videos about the team. At eleven everyone has to be in their room. By midnight you have to be asleep; you cannot watch television. They come and take your phones. A member of the management staff always collects the cell phones of all the players. To get around this rule, Napoleon maintains two phones:

Because when you go to camp they take the phones from us, so they come to our rooms around eleven during camp to take the phones from us. They say we will not sleep we will talk on our phones to our girlfriends and wives if they do not take the phones away. So I have two phones, I give them one phone and keep the other one. After taking their phones, management goes around to the hotel rooms to make sure the lights and televisions are off. This basically forces the players to sleep because they have nothing else to do.

Restrictions on the interaction of football players with women are also exist outside of club activities in Egypt. Exceptions are applied to married football players. According to the players I interviewed, Egyptian football teams do support married African football players and help obtain the necessary resident visas for the player’s wife to live in Egypt. Clubs encourage married players to bring their wives to Egypt; however, no one I interviewed was married. Sports clubs discourage if not actively prohibit single males from interaction with women because they are not married. As Mary Douglas was quoted earlier, patterns of sexual danger in Egypt are symbolic of hierarchy and conformity within Egyptian culture. Egyptian club teams’ restrictions on players’ interactions with women play on multiple discourses about marriage, relationships, sexuality in Egypt, and African male sexuality.
Many players cannot go out clubbing or go to parties and could be fined by their club if caught. Interaction with women outside of these spaces is also restricted, especially within their home. Henry described to me how he had invited a fellow African player and his wife over to his house to watch a football game on television soon after he had signed a contract with his club. Once he reported to the next practice, he was accused of having sex with the woman, who was African as well. The team doctor and coach blamed the player’s groin injury on him having too much sex and not over exertion on the field. Henry describes this moment as “when all the problems started.” He further elaborated that the club prevents him from doing many things on his personal time.

You are not allowed to be seen with any females unless you are married. It is weird. I cannot go to clubs or dancing. I feel very much controlled by the club; it doesn’t help my football. My club and coach are very strict. Some Egyptian teammates of mine just wanted to go to a party, someone tattled on them to the coach and management. The club then seized their salary for the month.

Henry believes the boweb (doorman) and his roommates who are also his teammates, spy on him and other teammates in the building. He told me that people pay attention to the time the players come and go as well as where they go. Teammates are always gossiping about each other. Privacy, he says, is hard to find. Other players have described this issue, and to avoid some of these complications they choose to live outside of the neighborhood they play in order to have more “freedom.”

Henry’s experience of having his heterosexuality blamed for his injuries was symbolic of not only the idea that a women’s sexuality will pollute and endanger the football player, but discourses about African males’ heterosexual activities. African males are stereotyped as over sexual. Therefore, in order to protect these men from the tarnishing sexuality of women, they must be restricted from female interaction. The
football manager regulates space through the creation of rules, which limit the spatial areas that the player can navigate such as dance clubs where interactions with woman are greater. Each manager has his own rules, which vary in severity; yet, there are three common themes. Mouctar explained them, as “you must not go to clubs. You must not flirt with sluts. You must not go to the press.”

In comparison to a player’s home country, where pre-martial sex is more accepted, Egypt has many social rules that seek to prevent pre-martial sex. African football players are largely sexually frustrated and find this frustration a motivation to not continue playing in Egypt. As Henry voiced “I want to leave as soon as possible after the season is over because of the culture. It is different, direct opposite and direct opposite of football culture in Europe. You are not allowed to be seen with any females unless you are married. It is weird. I cannot go to clubs or dancing.” Many times when the players voice frustration, they tend to make comparisons to Europe, as if they had been there and are experts on European culture and football. They compare European culture and football with their Egyptian counterparts and object to the later as Henry did above.

Players describe the lack of interactions with women as having negative effects on their ability to play. As discussed earlier in chapter four, this is the complete opposite of a manager’s position in trying to prevent and limit female interaction in order to avoid the polluting female sexuality and preserve Egyptian cultural norms. African players believe sexual frustration will eventually affect their ability to play because it leads to unhappiness. Fred voiced his frustration:

16Original quote in French: “Il ne faut pas aller en boîte. Il ne faut pas flirter avec des putes. Il ne faut pas aller au presse.”
They [management] want you to concentrate on football all the time; you cannot just live like that… I go home from training. You cannot go anywhere; we do not have anyplace to go. I do not have much of a social life. To become the best player you need to be happy, their culture we do not like it. You cannot talk to a woman; you cannot date a woman because the culture limits you from interacting with them. They cannot expect you to play well all the time if you are unhappy and you cannot even be in a relationship.

Castro elaborates further the understanding that a “happy” player will play well and an unhappy player will not. Castro explained that you are given more “space” in Ghana to do things on your personal time. Space signifies two things. First, space is a negotiable physical space. Second, space as Bourdieu defined the social structure in which people navigate and struggle with a complex set of objective and subjective social relations (1989:17). In contrast to Ghana, Castro explains below how Egypt differs:

In Egypt, um… they like sometimes they make life difficult for we the foreigners because you know um footballers are making gym now. We have certain type of life that we live. There are players that they can stay at home not do anything and they will not be happy and they will not be able to play. Players that go out and have fun and they will be happy and on the field they will play. The mentality in Egypt has to change a little bit where players can get freedom to move around freedom to have fun and play. If they are not playing than it is different, but here you can even go, they don’t want to see you at the nightclubs. They don’t want to see you at the nightclub. They don’t want to see you drinking.

Nightclubs are usually mentioned while talking about women. Many of the players are not allowed to go to nightclubs, which they find frustrating and depressing. They enjoy going out and dancing. A player ultimately feels that he is unhappy because of the rules set by his manager, he feels that it affects his performance negatively.

The preservation of Egyptian cultural norms relate to the restrictions sub-Saharan players feel and experience. The rules are reflective of cultural norms that players would encounter without the surveillance of football clubs. Nonetheless, my interviewees perceive these club and cultural restrictions as hurtful to their productivity as football
players. In Egypt, the ideal woman maintains purity and virginity until marriage, which upholds her and her family’s honor. In general, Egyptian society maintains gender segregation; however, there are many pockets where the lines are blurred. You can find young unmarried couples by the Nile and in cafes in the early evening. As the evening goes on the number of single women out and about on the street without a male relative is low. Pre-marital sex does happen in Egypt, yet it is taboo and socially unacceptable. African players perceive Egyptian restrictions on interactions with women as restrictive to themselves. Ricky explains “you cannot talk to a women, you cannot date a woman because the culture limits you from interacting with them.” Common cultural discourse or space creates the ideal relationship between men and women, which have a direct affect on an African player’s lifestyle and interaction with women.

There is a common explanation among footballers that “they [Egyptians]” say “no” to multiple habits because it is against Egyptian culture as if Egyptian culture is absolute. Napoleon explains: “In Ghana you can wear any clothes on the street; here I cannot. You cannot have a girlfriend or kiss her on the streets unlike in Ghana. So here they will say no. Also you cannot wear any sleeveless, even in summer time. They say no.” In another interview, Martin further expands upon this: “It is kind a station everything goes about. I mean the culture is not by law the culture. Everything you do if we did it wrong the way they would say no it is against our culture. Not their law, everything.”

The rules are a way of disciplining football players into behaving as the institution deems appropriate. These rules make a player subject to a club’s managerial expectations or else they will be punished mostly through fining. In order to enforce
these rules, clubs use surveillance and punishment. What happens when you break these rules is outlined below.

**Punishment**

When a player misbehaves and breaks a rule, the manager fines him. Monetary fining is a universal method of discipline and punishment by the clubs in Europe and Egypt alike. Tardiness to practice and events is almost a universally fined offense in Europe. Timeliness is required in most occupations; however, most employers outside of the football industry do not fine tardiness (Kelly and Waddington 2006:155). Fining is a method of disciplining employees to behave in a certain way. During the factory era of the 19th century in Britain, factory owners fined their late employees to control their behavior. Today, although most other industries have replaced fines for repeated tardiness with a warning system, the football industry has conserved them (Kelly and Waddington 2006:155).

Fines are the primary form of punishment in Egyptian football clubs. The rules set by the manager are usually brought forth in the contract negotiations and explained prior to any signatures. Fred explains that these rules are not negotiable and fines are implemented for offenses other than just tardiness: “before you a sign a contract, they set rules to live by and they will take away money if you break those rules. They give you half your salary at the beginning and then they will give you another 50% after the games. If the team does not do well, they will take away money.”

As Fred highlighted, in Egypt you can be punished monetarily for not performing well. Because of the football industry’s increasing corporatization and commercialization (Bourdieu 1998), clubs under immense pressure not to fail or under
perform as they lose sponsorship money and potential fans. There are other forms of
punishment beyond fines, which Martin elaborates below:

Here the signs of the football, signs, I mean the way they understood football. The white football, in their culture or in their perception is you have to win you don’t need to lose. Here [in Egypt] you have to win you must win you must. If you lose there is a lot of badding [sic] on you. Reaction, punishment [is] direct [and] indirect, all of these are some things [they do to punish us].

To clarify direct and indirect punishment are ways in which clubs demonstrate anger and seek revenge for bad performance. Clubs will use methods to indirectly or passively punish the players like delaying the salary, as Martin explains:

They will delay it [pay check], but they will say uh… they will tell you they are not [to] blame for it. They are processing it. They are processing it. But if you compare it to the previous month, you will see that no they are not processing it because at the end of each month on the 27th they will put your money in your account. But compared to this month they will put your money on the next month in the first week, but if you ask them they will say that we are [just] processing it.

In 2009, a former Zamalek player, Junior Agogo from Ghana, claimed that Zamelek had failed to pay him his salary during the previous five months. He then chose to break his contract (Footylatest 2009:1). Agogo butted heads with Zamalek management after being traded from Nottingham Forest in England for Zamelek’s Amir Zaky (Footylatest 2009:1; Brown 2008:1). Agogo claimed to the press that:

For the past five months I was not paid, I was fined US$200,000 for no crime and all these were not even written down in a letter to me. I stayed on because I thought things might improve but it didn’t… The injustice being meted out against me grew by the day and therefore I decided to report the issue to FIFA to seek redress. Under the current climate if I stayed here whilst taking action against the club my life could be at risk so I decided to leave and to press charges against the club at FIFA (Footylatest 2008:1).

Both Castro and Martin also claimed that Zamalek fans had attacked Agogo in retaliation for his bad performance, but I found nothing to back up this claim. Physical assault against players by football fans in Egypt is not uncommon; Ultras fans have

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previously admitted to it, which is a discussed later in this chapter. Agogo obviously feared some form of backlash from Zamalek fans because he felt he needed to leave the country in order to protect himself while filing complaints with FIFA. Agogo mentions fining which is a direct form of punishment. Coincidently while I was researching him, during a phone conversation with Thomas, he started laughing randomly in reaction to the people on the street who kept calling him Agogo. Whether it is his unique name or his reputation, Agogo definitely remains in Egyptian memory.

Other forms of punishment include neglect, as Martin explains: “The direct one is coming on the pitch, they will neglect you, the neglection [sic], they neglect you. Emotionally, they will cut you off. Even if you ask them something, we don’t know or wait after. You will see it on their face when it is direct.” Though Martin’s explanation is understated and to me the staff comes across as passive-aggressive, Managers do display their dissatisfaction on different levels. Paul voiced that sometimes, their anger is even more direct like depictions of angry coaches in Hollywood films: “We have only lost one match. [when we lost the match] the coach was very angry he destroyed every dust pan away so so mad. They are violent.”

A player by signing a contract becomes dependent upon a manager’s approval in order to receive their full wages and to play in a game. Thus a player is subject to a manager by control and dependence. The ultimate form of control and enforcement is what Foucault’s describes as surveillance within his example of a panopticon, which is described in the next section.

**Enforcing Rules through Fear of Surveillance**

*When I was playing in Ghana I was doing a whole lot. You can move around and have all the fun. We used to go around in the car and go to the club. In Ghana,*
they don’t put so much pressure on you the footballer. You just have fun... In Ghana the coach is more, he more cares about what is on the field not off the field. But we all know off the field too is all part of the professional. And it is all part of the football but at least you are given space to do something for yourself whether what you want to do. Not like here you understand? –Castro, Ghana

The rules can only be enforced effectively if the manager is able to monitor a player’s behavior. The football club is an institution that uses the manager as a heightened watchful gaze that looks over the players. We can understand further the manager’s technique of surveillance and discipline through Michel Foucault’s theory articulated in the book *Discipline and Punish* (1995). The technologies and knowledge connected to biopower seek to “control, regulate and dominate people to make them docile bodies” (Danaher et al 2002:66). Technologies of power used by football managers are a mechanism to regulate football players. One technique that Foucault discusses, is surveillance through the example of a panopticon17, the ideal prison whose inmates come to discipline or regulate their own behavior because they are could be under observation at any moment. Foucault describes the advent of prisons as a means to a more controlled form of punishment. Previously, punishment has been carried out by public chain gangs, which was used during an interperiod between public torture and prisons. The prison serves as an institutional center of punishment whose method of discipline is surveillance (Foucault 1995:195). African football players are subjected to panopticon-like surveillance in multiple ways.

African football players modify their behavior to act as they are supposed to act according to institutionalized knowledge imposed on the body through disciplinary

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17 Designed by Jeremy Bentham, the panopticon allowed for observation of all cells within a prison, but the prisoners were unable to know for certain if they were ever being watched. Therefore prisoners would have to adjust their behavior in fear of being watched to avoid bad behavior thus punishment.
practices of managers and Egyptian cultural discourses. When Henry was invited to a concert with some friends of mine, he agreed to come to the concert, but he claimed he would have to disguise himself in order to attend. However, when the night came, Henry was too paranoid and canceled. He explained the evening before, after winning their game, some of his Egyptian teammates went to a club in celebration, others recognized them at the club and their attendance was reported to the manager who fined the Egyptian players, by withholding part of their salary. Like a prisoner in a panopticon, Henry and other players never really know when they are being watched. Therefore, Henry feels compelled to disguise himself in order to avoid recognition by someone who could possibly jeopardize his paycheck and his relationship with his manager.

The football club provides Henry an apartment where he lives with Egyptian teammates. By providing him with an apartment, Henry supposes that the club abuses this privilege of controlling where he lives. He is certain that the club influences those in the building to keep a watch on him including his boweb (doorman), who he insists, watches his every move. Additionally, Ricky, whose contract ended over the summer 2010, was encouraged to sleep and live on the club grounds in their small apartments, which they provide for the team. However, he refused and found his own place to live, having no desire to live in the clubhouse and believing that the club would restrict his lifestyle.

Added to this is the fact that football players are public figures whose faces are recognizable by some members of society who are not affiliated with the club. Multiple players have complained to me that Egyptians gossip a lot. When I was discussing other players with Castro and Martin, they mentioned one player in particular, and Castro
apologized for not having invited him when he realized that I had not interviewed him. Their friend used to live about an hour’s drive from where he played and practiced. When I asked why this was the case, Castro explained that “it is [name of club] you know, people talk… you want to stay far away from where you play. Egyptians gossip a lot.” Both Maleek and Paul also chose to live to farther away from where they played to have more “freedom.” To try to avoid the panopticon they try to live away from it as much as possible in order to attempt to distance themselves from the watchful gaze. Despite distances that they manage to create, players never feel truly free of this gaze because they never know who is observing them. This is the antithesis of a panopticon that those within it are unable to know when they are being watched. The uniqueness of their panopticon is that they know they are being watched in certain situations.

The idea of surveillance for a player can happen through others observing them in public or surveillance of their bodies through physical examination by a team doctor or during practice by the team manager. Punishment or penal procedures move beyond the prison creating a carceral continuum\textsuperscript{18}. These institutions create discourses and rules that regulate behavior. These rules are “written” into the bodies of football players by structure time, space, and relations.

**Cultural Adjustments: Subjective Narratives About Egypt**

You are in another atmosphere [that] they create. I mean an exclusive atmosphere for themselves; they want everyone to go again towards the atmosphere, which is very difficult. –Martin, Ghana

Martin believes that this ‘atmosphere’ is all-inclusive. It constrains you to act a certain way or make certain decisions in your everyday life. The ‘atmosphere’ or cultural sphere

\textsuperscript{18} The Foucauldian process by which punishment or penal procedures move beyond the prison into other parts of life.
is so strong that it limits players from living a lifestyle they prefer. This ‘atmosphere’ can be interpreted as the subjectification that the players experience that relates to the rules above, but also the unique cultural situations in Egypt. Egyptian cultural practices are by all means a large presence in the lives of African football players. Their job requires them to interact and work with a large number of Egyptians from multiple classes and multiple educational backgrounds almost on a daily basis. African football players are more engrossed in Egyptian cultural practices than the average foreign expatriate in Egypt. Their subjective experience creates interesting narratives about Egyptians and Egyptian football that are not always clearly a result of club rules, but are reflective of a cultural regime that exists in their everyday lives.

*Differing Discourses About Religion*

Hassan Sheheta, the former Egyptian National football coach stated during the build up to the 2010 African Cup of Nations that not only skills and competence, but also piety is important in selecting his squad. The Egyptian squad’s nickname the Pharaohs is slowly changing to *Montakhab El Sagedeen*, which Osama Diab translates literally to the team of prostrates. The act of prostration in Islam is a religious act that “expresses gratitude” to god after achieving something. It is not unusual for national team players and Egyptian league players to drop on their knees after scoring in thanks to God (Diab 2010:1).

The Associated Press quoted Hassan Sheheta as saying, “without [piety], we will never select any player regardless of his potential. I always strive to make sure that those who wear the Egypt jersey are on good terms with God” (Diab 2010:1). Al Shorouk newspaper further reported that Hassan Sheheta had purposely left Egyptian striker,
Mido\textsuperscript{19} off the team because he once styled his hair with a ponytail and dated Miss Belgium 2000 (Diab 2010:1). Sheheta’s statements are symbolic of changes in Egyptian society since the 1980’s that have now resulted in an extremely less secular society that has been replaced by rapid Islamicization and the protection of traditional values from encroaching foreign influence. Egypt’s population numbers around 79 million. It is estimated that ten percent of the population are Christian while the remainder and majority are Sunni Muslims (Central Intelligence Agency 2010:1). Similar to club rules, players view Egyptian religious practices as a restricting regime in their lives. This is not to say religion is not important to the players, it is quite the contrary, but the way their religion is practiced in Egypt differs greatly from their home countries.

Religion is an important aspect of the lives of many of the football players. I interviewed Thomas on church grounds, where he spends every Friday attending church services, “I have not missed one church service since I have arrived in Egypt.” Castro describes pre-game ritual, which always includes reading the bible and praying, “On a game day I probably read the bible and pray a little bit, sleep, eat a little bit. I don’t eat a lot because when I eat a lot I cannot play I cannot even run. That is it.” His friend Martin, a Muslim recites the Koran on game day, “On game day I just recite the Koran, just recite it. There are some verses inside it, which normally if you read you get luck to win the match. So I wrote and I had it on my notes.”

African players perceive religion in Egypt, in particular the way Islam is practiced in Egypt, as a restricting force in their lives. They correlate the Egyptian practice of

\textsuperscript{19} Known simply as Mido, Ahmed Hossam Hussein Abdelhamid is a top Egyptian player who has been capped 51 times for the Egyptian National Team. His professional football career has mostly taken place in Europe rather than in Egypt.
Islam as a defining cultural practice. When talking about the differences between Islam in Ghana and Egypt, Martin explained “yeah it [Islam] is very different. Here it is difficult. In Ghana, everything is one, here it is different. Here you cannot live.” Martin was referencing his inability to have “freedom” in Egypt, which prevents him from living the same lifestyle he led in Ghana. Castro further explained that in Ghana, there is ambiguity, “here [in Egypt] it is easy for you to identify a Muslim. In Ghana, it is difficult [to identify someone] unless the person tells you…Muslims go to the church, Christians go around the mosque. They don’t care. Ghana is the place to be.”

For Christians, playing with a majority of Muslims can be a culture shock. It can be said that the religious influence on Egyptian culture is embodied in some club rules especially interactions with women. Players are subject to religious codes through club rules. Interestingly enough players never make this correlation. They almost always separate the restricting nature of club rules from Egyptian religious regimes. Fred was the only one who even mentioned religion in his club and even then he did not correlate with club rules. Instead, he complained about how as a Christian he is not treated with the same respect as a Muslim: “they take the religious aspect of your football our of yourself, if you are Christian. They [Egyptian teammates] have tried to convert me; they wanted to force me to convert. They will not like you [if you are Christian], they will treat you without respect.”

_Egyptians are African! : Narratives of Egyptian African Identity_

Despite the various nationalities of the African players I interviewed, they all seemed to be frustrated with the fact that Egyptians did not view themselves as African. These players view Egypt as African, but then immediately elaborate Egyptian culture is
different from their own. There is a tension within their narratives that tries to identify Egyptians as African, but the narratives cannot overlook the cultural differences that the players encounter. Egyptians in their minds are a special kind of African who thinks differently from other Africans. Napoleon voiced this complex idea that Egyptians are African, but than they are ‘different’: “Sometimes Egyptians …are different from other Africans because of their culture. They do not think they are African. When they see black players they call them African, but they are African, they do not consider themselves African.”

This also relates to frustrations as being perceived as a foreign player and the limitations on the number of foreign players in Egyptian clubs. Castro believed that Egyptians are African and therefore Africans should not be viewed as foreign players in Egypt, but as local players:

If one day I should have the chance to meet the CAF, African football people… when I have the chance to meet them, I would tell them that it has to change in Egypt. Egypt is an African country. Tunisia is an African country. All these people are African countries. If they want to get a player in the same, they want three foreigners then if someone is from America he has to be a foreigner they do what we do. If someone is from Afghanistan, Iraq, Germany, then they need to do what we do, but if you are African this is Africa [by this time his voice was louder. His speech more rapid and his tone clearly frustrated]. This is not America. This is not Europe. This is Africa. So they have to understand that this is Africa if they want a foreign player and an African player comes in here, than he is not a foreign player he is an African player then he has to play. This is what I think has to stop because look in Europe. In Europe, it is open. Exactly it is open in Europe, so why what is happening in Africa. That it cannot open. What are they doing? However Martin states after Castro stops talking that Egyptians cannot afford more than three players: “They are talking about their economic standard. They can’t afford it. You see they can’t afford it. Egyptians cannot afford to take care of more than three foreigners in one club.” However later in our interview both Martin and Castro complain
that Africans are paid less, not only in Egypt, but globally. Seen as unfair, they believe Africans need to stop being viewed as cheap labor, which was discussed in chapter five. My understanding is that African players are cheaper than Egyptians in most circumstances and both Martin and Castro have asserted this was true. What Martin is possibly getting at is that it would not be popular with fans if they employ large numbers of foreign players, which could lead to a fan revolt. Egyptian fans are often very vocal if they are unhappy with teams or regulations especially Ultras groups.

They find it frustrating to be singled out as a foreigner in Egypt where they struggle with a complex set of objective conditions and their subjective experiences. This frustration is bigger than just pan-Africanism, it links itself to the frustration of living in Egypt and cultural differences. They know they are in Africa, but they perceive the culture as nothing like it is at home. It is seen as far more restrictive in mobility and social interaction, but they are unable to escape it. This plays into discourses about “freedom” and choice. African players continually feel that are not at home when they compare styles of play even though they are in Africa.

*Egyptian Style of Play verses “African” Style of Play*

On the playing field, players perceive the Egyptian style of play as more aggressive and organized while they describe themselves and other African players as having a more ‘Brazilian’ style of play, meaning more creative, freeing and fun. Castro could easily describe the Ghanaian style of play, but was loss for words when trying to find a country comparative to Egypt:

Yeah [there is] a big difference[ between Egyptian and Ghanaian football]. A big big difference. In Ghana, we play, the people of Ghana when we are playing football, we play with more fun, it is more like the Brazilian way of play where they go to the field to have fun to play football and then whatever the score is whoever wins wins but here it is more …
Martin interjected and stated “pressure moments” while Castro reflected and built up Martin’s idea of pressure within Egyptian football:

There’s pressure there is a lot of pressure. They [Egyptians] want to win they. You know what I am saying. They do everything to win. In Ghana it is more the fun part of it where you go and you have fun and play and you excite the people who come to watch, but here it is not, it is not about excitement. It’s just playing and let my team win. So Ghanaian football is more like the Brazilian football and here it is something else I do not know which other countries to compare [it to].

The understanding that Egyptian style of football is different is coupled with the understanding that Egyptian football has had more success in terms of organization and monetary reward while also being less “free” and more stressful. Charles believes this correlates with football’s relatively high popularity in Egypt: “The difference is that football here is more organized than Nigerian football. More people play in Egypt, they are more obsessed.” Egypt’s football industry is seen as more competitive and allows a player to grow because of the exposure to a different style of play. Ricky even went to an extreme to say that he can play anywhere now because of having played in Egypt: “If you can play in Egypt you can play anywhere because man marking\textsuperscript{20} is so common here. You have to have perseverance to get past these markers. The level of play is harder.” To move past these markers, it takes not only perseverance, but aggression on the field, which is a necessary skill in Egyptian football according to Paul, “Egypt likes aggressive players. If you are not aggressive they will not even look or sign you.”

As I did further research, it became apparent that most African players play forward or mid-field position and hardly ever on the defensive line. This is

\textsuperscript{20} Man marking or man-to-man marking is a defensive strategy used by teams to prevent opposing forwards from obtaining the ball by using a player to block the opposing player. Man-to-man marking is when a player is assigned a specific player to mark during the duration of the game instead of certain area of the field.
representative of stereotypes held by both Egyptians and African players themselves that African players are more energetic and driven. Castro explained to me that this relates to football culture where African players for instance in Ghana grow up playing street football, which develops certain skills that make Ghanaians better forwards or midfielders:

You know the problem is… see in Ghana, we start football on the streets. And When you play street football [it] makes you skillful because when you play street football lets say you go to the street at 4 o’clock every 4 o’clock you go to the street and then you have about twenty or thirty young kids like you and you guys have to play just one ball. So when you are playing, all you have to do is protect then ball. So when I have the ball I don’t want to lose it to someone else so it makes you learn how to dribble because you don’t want to lose it you don’t want to give it to this one. So growing up it makes…it brings the skills in us out. So it either makes you a mid-fielder or a striker.

After Castro finished, I posed the question whether the Ghanaian national team is awful at defense seeing that Castro’s explanation would lend itself to an understanding that the situation in Ghana is not suitable to the development of a solid defense. His response almost negates what he had explained previously, by stating the Ghanaian national team lacks strikers, “Most of the time we, the Ghanaian National Team, we are lacking strikers that is a problem with Ghanaian team we are lacking strikers, but I think maybe they should start something from the junior level strikers.”

Castro’s friend, Martin went on to explain that Egyptians train their own players to play defense and that they want to import attackers or strikers:

And one thing too, let me add, I mean playing back as defensive to go outside [Ghana] to get a club and be defensive because each country like Egyptian they don’t want defenders, they want either attackers or strikers. They will train their own Egyptians [players] to be defenders. They will train them. Yeah to be defending and you as a foreigner to be striking because we we get extra energy. That is what they are saying.

Like Martin who perceives himself as someone with extra energy because he is African and a forward, Charles believes that Africans tend to play in more attacking positions
“because we have a fighting spirit that is why we are always forwards.” This idea that Ghanaians and other African have extra energy is propagated not only by Africans themselves, but also the Egyptian football industry. Castro, who out of all the players was the most vocal, the most descriptive, found this stereotype to be very upsetting. He believes that it creates high expectations that misuse African players:

That is what I don’t believe in that is what I hate. I don’t want to hear that. That mentality of… that mentality in Egypt has to stop. Where by when they see an African player they think that oh this guy that want you to play as a defender as a striker. They want you to play here they want you to play there. They want you to move around and do everything on the field. An African is an African. He is the same blood that is in you. If you have an Egyptian who is a defender that you use him on defense alone… We have to use an African player when his playing as mid field use him as mid-field alone, but here they want you to go play as a striker come back just because you are African because they think we Africans we have I don’t know, a certain ass that can run for a hundred minutes. It is wrong. It is just because we are more determined.

Though Castro criticizes the stereotypes that African players are more energetic, he still distinguishes Africans from others by stating that they are more “determined.” However determination requires a certain form of conduct and work ethic that is demonstrated through certain kinds actions and attributes, one of which could be energetic, which is required to succeed during football matches. Thus Castro, unintentionally stereotypes African players the same way that Egyptians and other African players do, despite his own anger towards this stereotype. These stereotypes and identity are part of the player’s subjectification as the player is “tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (Foucalt 1994:331). Discourses about West African football players is a form of power that marks the players of his individuality, which Foucault elaborates “attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him” (1994:331). These players are marked of a certain identity that they thus accepted such as Africans are energetic.
**Sore Losers: Egyptian Football Fandom**

“If there are fans and we lost the game, they yell at us on the street. If we win, they say hi and go. The fans here are crazy.” – Maleek, from Nigeria

In 2007, enthusiastic Egyptian fans brought a supporter style called Ultras to Egypt (Charbel 2009: 1). The term Ultras was coined in the 1960’s by hard-core football fans in Northern Italy, as a form of supporter style and culture (Giulianotti and Robertson 2007: 67). Ultra means beyond in Latin; it indicates that the fan’s enthusiasm is beyond the expected or normal quantity of the average fan. The Ultras work in groups to produce elaborate fanatical displays of support of a team during competitions (Mazhar 2009:1). Egypt has localized these traditions of Ultras spectatorship. Ultras in Egypt are formed and supported monetarily by well-educated leaders from typically upper-class families.

There are five Ultras fan groups in Egypt Ultras Ahlawy (Al Ahly), White Knights (Zamalek), Yellow Dragons (Ismaili), Green Eagles (Masri), and Ultras 300 (Tanta). Inas Mazhar describes their support as behavioral tendencies including “the use of flares primarily in TIFO\(^{21}\) choreography, vocal support in large groups, defiance of authorities, and the display of banners at football stadiums, which are used to create an atmosphere, which intimidates opposing players and supporters” (2009:1). Violent hooliganism is not uncommon with Ultras groups. After a loss against the Army’s team, members of the White Knight Ultras group had pelted soldiers with stones in revenge. Nine white knights were charged with assaulting soldiers following this match in 2008 (Charbel 2009:2).

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\(^{21}\) TIFO are choreographed displays of support for football teams. They usually involve a large group of people that either hold up a large banner or hold colored cards in mosaic patterns that can possible spell or create an image that symbolize the team. It could also involve a mixture of both, as well as flags, streamers, and jerseys. A TIFO does last longer than several minutes.
Violence is not solely a form of emotion and competition between competing sides, but is a purposeful form of encouragement for one’s own team (Charbel 2009:2). A member of White Knights explained to Jano Charbel. “In fact, we Ultras sometimes attack our own club members and managers when their performances fall into decline. This is our way of encouraging them to improve their performance,” (2009:2). African football players substantiate this claim. Beyond Ultras Fan groups, Egyptian fans of the local Egyptian leagues also react violently to loss of their home teams. Some African players choose to live outside of their local neighborhoods to avoid being recognized in the street and attacked by Egyptians when their team loses. Henry explained:

Some people [Egyptians] recognize us, some places because we train there. My club is in Maadi and if one time you play bad and people attack you in your house. In Europe they accept defeat. Here they want to win every time so when you don’t, they do not understand. They have high expectations. Fred chooses to deny his identity when Egyptians recognize him on street, “people get attacked because they do not play well. They [Egyptians] will attack, I change my name because I do not want people on the street to talk to me when they recognize me. I tell them [that] I am a student and I am not a footballer.” The fear of attack perpetuates an idea among players that Egyptians cannot handle losing even though someone always has to lose. Players fear Egyptians fans because they believe fans are violent others despite the fact that they support the team that the footballer plays for.

Mohammed, the agent who is already disliked by football clubs themselves because he strives to find contracts for players in Europe, fears Ultras groups. “I am afraid to get attacked by the fans because I move their players. The press has a lot to do with it. The press helps dramatize and make it worse for the fans.” Despite the concerns of Mohammed and other players, one Zamalek player told me that the Ultras were the
best fans in the stadium. He went on to say that Egyptian fans help to make Egypt a very
good place to play because of their passion and love for the game. Ultras and fans create
a unique atmosphere in which football players compete and live. Ultras and fans remind
players of their public identity in friendly and unfriendly ways.

**Conclusion**

The body is ultimately very important to a player’s career on the field; however, a
player’s body is not solely an apparatus to perform and play the football game. The
manager uses multiple techniques to control players. Fining, fear of observation, lack of
support, and indirect forms of punishment such as delaying their salaries are ways in
which these managers discipline their players to provoke them to behave in certain ways.
Their rules move beyond the field or the clubhouse to the players’ private lives in order to
control them further. It is through these techniques of power forced upon the body of
these players that they become objectified. Neoliberalism’s influence on the economic
and social systems around the world has facilitated the decommodification of football
players in some sense, yet this decrease is not reflected in how clubs view players, both
they and players themselves continue to use commodifying language to speak of players,
for example, describing them as being bought and sold. Within Egypt, they are no less
objectified than previously. Football players are by all means aware that their manager is
trying to control them. What has changed are the methods through which players are
objectified which have developed a long clearly neoliberal lines. Players blame this
controlling nature on the Egyptian football system and Egyptian cultural traditions. Yet
they are aware of some of the processes of commodification, through they are unable to
express it using these terms. As a result of their objectification, they view Egyptian as a
cultural place, which requires them to adjust to it when living here. The way in which they are subjectified to a regime is inseparable form their subjectivity as individual who understand themselves and their experiences.
Conclusion

The primary goal of this thesis was to document the process of sub-Saharan football labor migration into Egypt by understanding how economic and state policy, as well as individual actors, facilitate this migration and affect the localized experience of football players in Egypt. What players expressed through their narratives of migration, club treatment, and Egyptian culture is that there are multiple individuals that affect their experience of migration to Egypt within their own national domestic leagues and the Egyptian football industry. All of these individual actors have a vested interest in each player. The player’s body is a site of multiple types of values (including use-value and exchange-value) that these individuals seek to take advantage of and often increase using multiple techniques, such as facilitating their migration, human capital investment, and controlling the body by objectifying the player into a subject. It is their subjective experience that negotiates their migration to Egypt and the life they establish. In collecting these narratives, this thesis has come to understand the extent of neoliberalism’s range within the life and work experiences of an African football labor migrant in Egypt by answering the following questions: What role does Egypt play in this larger global football industry? How do players view Egypt within the global football industry? What is experience of this role by football players in Egypt? How does Egypt’s role within the neoliberal global football industry enable and facilitate sub-Saharan football labor migration to Egypt? How do these players navigate these hegemonic regimes of influence in their everyday lives?
Egypt and the Global Industry

With the exception of Martin, sub-Saharan African players have one common goal: to play for European teams. This research came to understand that they use Egypt as a nodal point or a “go-between” as the sports agent, Mohammed called it, in order to transition from Africa to Europe. They see Egypt as a transit destination where they wait for the next opportunity to arise in order to move on to better venues or circumstances. The players will likely leave as better-trained and with a higher price and use-value. That said, there are players who remain in Egypt longer than they anticipate, such as Napoleon who has been in Egypt for over six years. The ideal situation, however, would involve playing in Egypt and either be transferred to Europe before the end of their contract or obtaining a European contract after two years playing in Egypt. The way players view Egypt as a passing phase, a place of transit, in their personal football careers is comparable to Egypt’s role within the global football industry.

World systems theory posits that labor is organized and divided through core-periphery relations. The global football industry is no different and maintains divisions of labor. Egypt’s place within the global football industry lies within the semi-periphery. The Egyptian football industry is not exactly a part of the core, but has moved away from being in the periphery. As a part of the semi-periphery, Egypt shares many aspects with both the core and the periphery. Yet, the core exploits the semi-periphery while the latter simultaneously exploits the periphery (Wallerstein 1976: 231). As Wallerstein (1976) described the semi-periphery, Egypt provides a connection and facilitates communication between the core and the periphery through its industry and by being the headquarters of the African Football Federation (CAF). The Egyptian football leagues are far more developed and maintain much larger amounts of capital than the countries where the
players I interviewed emigrated. Football labor migration to Egypt is representative of this movement between the semi-periphery and periphery. Egypt is much easier to migrate to than Europe and most players interpret Egypt as a place of transit that will create more opportunities for future travel/migration to Europe. There is a lower amount of spatial obstacles in comparison to the core, which allows for easier mobility between states. If Egypt did not limit the amount of foreign labor per team to three bodies, based on this research it could be foreseeable that Egypt would encounter a larger influx of football labor migrants because there would be more available positions; thus creating more capital for agents to accumulate, as well as more sub-Saharan Africans traveling independent of an agent because of the lowered boundaries.

**Neoliberalism’s Range**

The neoliberal project has made certain processes, such as deregulation, commercialization, privatization, and the accrual of large amounts of capital, the center of its belief system. The Egyptian football industry has adopted many of these processes, which have increased football labor migration globally. Neoliberalism in Egypt has changed the way professional football players play, live, and work. Local actors have implemented and taken advantage of the neoliberal project. Football agents have used loosened foreign player quotas, straightforward visa processing between sub-Saharan Africa and Egypt, and deregulation of the labor market as a means to move and funnel significant quantities of foreign labor to Egypt.

The human sciences have agreed that neoliberalism is the most important contemporary force of social and economic change, although a disagreement about neoliberalism’s range remains (Ong 2006:11). Certainly neoliberalism is not absolute in
the Egyptian football industry nor does not it completely define the industry. By examining the nature of the Egyptian football industry this research yielded several interesting finding about the impact of neoliberalism on the Egyptian football industry. More specifically there are four exceptions where the industry lacks certain neoliberal thought 1) privatization is limited; 2) full commercialization is not realized 3) investment in human capital; 4) counter-results of deregulation and free agency.

As described in chapter one, Egyptian law has limited the deregulation of the Egyptian football industry in comparison to Europe, despite IMF restructuring programs in the 1990s and pressure from FIFA. Privatization of the industry is limited and former President Hosni Mubarak capitalized politically on the football industry in Egypt. A large percentage of clubs in Egypt are still owned by government ministries, which fund teams in all divisions. The decrease in funding seen in other sports during the 1990s did not affect the Egyptian football industry as much.

Furthermore, the commercialization of football, especially in terms of sports marketing, has not been fully realized. Within the Egyptian legal code there remain restrictions on non-profit clubs from establishing commercial companies that will allow them to merchandize and leverage their assets, including player contracts (Dorsey 2001f:1). The Egyptian revolution and President Hosni Mubarak’s resignation put on hold a law that would allow clubs to commercialize completely. In addition, other legislature that would reform Egyptian telecommunications law has also been put on hold and will not be addressed until after parliamentary elections in September 2011. These changes would abolish the exclusive broadcast rights held by Egyptian telecommunications authorities, which maintain the sole license of uplinks. This would
simultaneously take away state run television’s exclusive right to broadcast anything (including football) that happens within Egypt (Dorsey 2011f:1). Commercialization of the industry is thus limited to certain forms including team sponsorship, billboard advertising within stadiums, and limited merchandising. From the point of neoliberalism, the football industry is over-regulated and does not serve to create large amounts of capital in the industry because of its lack of privatization and commercialization.

Thirdly, the nature of the football industry requires clubs to invest in the well being of their product by investing in the human capital of their players, which in a neoliberal age is contrary to emerging practices. The club requires able bodies in order to compete and generate the product they are selling, which is technically the spectacle of competition. Therefore the labor needs to be maintained in ways that other industries do not require. Lastly, despite the de-commodification of football players through the creation of free agency and deregulation of labor markets, football clubs and managers do not view players as less of a commodity. In fact, players in Egypt are very much objectified and made subject to control and dependence on football clubs and managers for income, visa support, and attention to their professional development.

**Commodification and Subjectivity**

The thesis further looked into theories on commodification and subjectivity and how these apply to the individual player’s experience in Egypt. A football player’s body is a site of value that changes based on national origin of the player, his skill, his age, and his current location. Their bodies and values are always being shaped by others, including sports agents and managers, into a certain product and type of individual.
Forms of commodification and objectification are how managers and sports agents shape and manipulate football players and their values.

As the research has shown, the skill of a player determines their value; however, this value is relative to where the player is located. The value can increase and decrease based on what country the player is playing in, such as between Egypt and other African countries due to differences in available capital between countries. The price discrepancies between African player’s home countries and Egypt allow for agents and clubs to commodify the individual players through labor arbitrage. This territorialization of values creates incentives for agents to broaden professional networks abroad to allow them to benefit from labor arbitrage.

The differential values as a result of territorialization also encourage football clubs to invest in their players’ human capital in order to create surplus value while the player is under contract in order to be able to trade the player to more profitable teams within Egypt and abroad. In addition, a sub-Saharan player’s age can determine not only his monetary value, but also his marketability as younger players have the ability to gain larger differential changes in price and use-value than older players.

**Closing Remarks: Taking into Account the Egyptian Revolution**

Egypt erupted in protests against ex-President Hosni Mubarak several months after my field research had been completed. Beginning on the 25th of January 2011, the demonstrations lasted eighteen days, ending with Mubarak’s resignation from office on February 11th. As a result of the volatile situation in Egypt, the Egyptian Football Federation postponed all football activity across Egypt for six weeks at the end of January. The cancellations were not solely a result of the destruction and paralysis that
took over Cairo and much of Egypt, but it was also a political choice. Football was not isolated from the political revolution, but remained linked with political discourses from both pro-democracy and pro-Mubarak positions (Dorsey 2011c:1). The Egyptian Football Federation sought to prevent football stadiums, fields, and matches from becoming spaces for mass demonstrations, thus solidifying their loyalty towards President Mubarak (Dorsey 2011c:1). There were proposals to continue the league as normal without supporters in the stands. Ahly immediately rejected this idea, while Zamalek and the head coach of the national team, Hassan Sheheta, supported the proposal (Dorsey 2011a:1).

Individual members of the football industry came out in support of the protesters, including former Zamalek goalie, Nader El Sayed, Zamalek’s head coach Hossam Hassan, and Egyptian football star, Mido (Corbett 2011:1). Multiple media sources stated that football fans, specifically members of Ultras fan clubs, played significant roles in the pro-democracy movement because they are accustomed to and knowledgeable about confrontations with Egyptian police (Kirkpatrick and Sanger 2011:A1; Woodward 2011:1; Dorsey 2011b:1). The institutionalized elements of the industry and sport that had previously been manipulated by Mubarak’s regime to create a national conscience, completely turned against President Mubarak in the popular uprising. As such, the change in power and the potential democratic reforms that lies ahead could ultimately result in vast changes in Egyptian society that will affect Egypt’s football industry in the long-term.

Writing in the immediate post-revolution era, this research cannot predict which direction the Egyptian football industry will take. However, proposals have already been
advanced including salary and trade caps. Charges of corruption have been made against Mubarak’s Petroleum Minister, Sameh Fahmy, who gave generous handouts to football clubs owned by the ministry, including Eneppi and Petrojet, as well as division two teams, Gasco and Petrol Asyut (Dorsey 2011f:1). His successor is viewed as less inclined to give clubs large amounts of funding. Moreover, shifts in social, legal, and economic policies will allow for increased fluidity of the Egyptian football industry, including football labor migration in and out of Egypt. These fluid processes need to be addressed in future research about football in Egypt. It is a double-edged sword for the Egyptian football industry as Egypt’s future is still not clear; impending reforms could possibly increase football labor migration greatly while renewed violence could be detrimental to African football labor migration to Egypt.

As Egyptians continue to voice their concerns about government practices and spending, funding of football most likely will be criticized. Football will lose large monetary amounts of support and will have to look elsewhere. It is foreseeable that Egyptian football will experience large amounts of privatization and commercialization, as citizens demand transparency on government spending. Football fans have already demanded reforms within the industry. Perhaps in regards to football, citizens might actually welcome neoliberalization and privatization in Egypt.
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