

Football Labor Emigrations within Globalization and the sample of Turkey

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This article aims to discuss one of the phenomena of globalization: the impact of migration on sports, using football players in Turkey as an example. By presenting examples from both national and international sports teams, the growing number of migrant football players and their role in the capitalist economy is examined as it pertains to sport, as well as how they are treated within that system, economically and legally.

The emigration of football players requires a social, economic, political and cultural evaluation. The article is focused on the rights and freedom, civilly and labor-wise, of emigrant football players who are brought to or come to Turkey.

Key Words: Globalization, football labor emigration, human rights.

Introduction: Globalization and Sports

Understanding the current relationship between sports and globalization requires an understanding of the relationship between sports and capitalism. An analysis of capitalist theory, based drawing on three hundred years of capitalist production, class systems and exploitation mechanisms, will enable us to understand our age much better (Timur 2004).

In a capitalist system, profit from sports is gained by converting the sports field into an industrial field (Barut 2006). Gradually, what were community-based sports games became part of the economy (Hone 2005). Global expansion has seen the growth of a net-

work of sports business framed with meta-fetishism and trade, particularly elements like the production and marketing of sports equipment; advertising and sports product distribution is also an enormous element in the capitalization of sports. We can see a network that encompasses almost every region of the world through the business of football (Hödl 2006).

The impact of globalization is seen in the dramatic changes experienced by the sports industry in the last twenty years. Leagues and clubs are mainly managed, now, by free market rules. David Stern, the commissioner of America's National Basketball Association, draws attention to the natural integration of the rules of capitalism in sports by comparing basketball to Disney. His words are incisive: "Disney has theme parks, and we have theme parks. Only we call them arenas. They have characters: Mickey Mouse, Goofy. Our characters are named Magic (Johnson) and Michael (Jordan). Disney sells apparel; we sell apparel. They make home videos; we make home videos" (LaFerber 2001). Joao Havalange, the head of FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) shares the opinion of Mr. Stern, saying in his first speech; "I came to sell the product called football" (Merih 2004). Havalange kept his word. Under FIFA's management, football has become a significant business. (Aydın, Hatipoğlu, Ceyhan 2008). The saga of FIFA is more than just a successful development of the sport (Sugden and Tomlinson 2003).

The period of neo-liberal sport management began as a result of free market rules becoming the norm in the sport. Multinational companies noted the enormous impact of sports and the influence of certain figures and looked at sports as a way to sell product. Sports sponsorship has reached such dimensions in the last twenty years that some believe it would be impossible to produce of the Olympic games, motor

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sports competitions, about 90% of current golf tournaments, about half of the current tennis matches, about half the horse-riding events, and 20% of current football tournaments without sponsors (Şahin, Koç, Yılgin 2003).

Emigration of sportsmen from periphery countries to core countries as a result of globalization is now commonplace. From the 1990s, studies about this trend have been conducted but they are still insufficient compared to existing research in other areas of sport (Maguire 2004). For example, research on the history of sports labor emigration has just begun in Turkey.

Global Football Labor Emigrations

The Bosman ruling is the result of a lawsuit filed by Belgian professional football player Jean-Marc Bosman, establishing the “right to move freely” for football players (Bosman Ruling 2002). Higher salaries for top football players caused team owners to look for less expensive labor sources, and they looked at players in underdeveloped/developing nations. The establishment of Champions League and the global market which is greedily feeding this uncontrolled player migration without any restraint have been suggested as other reasons for the significant increase in labor migration (Magee and Sugden 2002).

Data recording human rights violations committed in the process of transferring and employing immigrant sportsman labor has emerged, despite the efforts of dominant powers in the field. A report presented to the Italian senate in November 1999, stated that about five thousand football players under the age of sixteen were brought from non-EU nations to play in amateur clubs illegally. Sergio Campana, the president of the Italian Football Federation, acknowledged this report in the following statement: *‘We are currently experiencing a shocking phenomenon. Young people without papers who are applying for a license remain on the football pitches for a very short time. Those who need to earn a living are beginning to work illegally and some cannot even find any home to sleep’* (Authier 2002) Most of the children mentioned in this report and in these statements are brought to Europe from Latin America and Africa. In November 2000, Belgium professional clubs and players in Brussels and Antwerp pitches - most of whom were younger -

filed an official grievance regarding the management companies. Their main point was that these underage players are not hired by professional clubs after “being tested successfully”; they are taken “as orphans” by clubs and management companies (cited by Andreff from Tshimanga 2005). The international definition of this would be “modern slave trading”. FIFA introduced rules on 1st of September 2001 in order to protect children under 18 in transfers. According to these rules, the transfer is banned if the player’s family is changing countries only because of the transfer (Akşar and Merih 2006). Despite the rules, the football labor market can still be exploitative. Young African and South American footballers are bought much cheaper compared to the top football players at present (Ling 2008).

The fact that sports players from developing nations make less money than their fellow players from industrialized nations is an indication of violations of rights. For example, when RAEC Mons hired Cameroonian Georges Moujando in 1996 for 150 euros per month, the monthly minimum wages of football players were 1000 euros in Belgium (Topçuoğlu 2006). Those who profit from the transfers are the clubs and partisan talent scout companies. In its present condition, football labor emigrations are just like “a new exploitation” order (Talimciler 2008).

Migrant Football Players in Turkey

Turkey’s import of migrant football players was a result of liberalization politics. The first football player was brought from Argentina in 1955, and more players arrived in Turkey during the 1960s. The process of moving Turkey into the global capitalist system began along with the neo-liberal politics of the new government established after the military coup in 12th September 1980. Encouraged by the Turkish government, a number of coaches and football players were brought from abroad (Gökaçtı 2008). Football became almost a vehicle for renewing Turkey’s image and influence.

The number of migrant football players increased rapidly in the 1990s. While the number of migrant football players in the Turkish First Football League was 64 in the 1996/97 season (Dorukkaya, Ebiçlioğlu, Kıratlı 1998), this increased to 141 in the 2006/07 sea-

son (İnal 2008) and to 153 in the 2008/09 season (Taraf Gazetesi 2009). The ratio of migrant football players to total football workforce was 17% in 2006/07 season and this rate rose to 29% in 2008/09 season. Most of the football emigrants in Turkey came from Brazil or the continent of Africa (Figure 1).

Turkey is regarded as a transition country for international migrations (Soysüren 2006). It is also valid for football labor emigrations. Less skilled players tend to “disappear” rapidly.

Fatih Terim, the coach of the Turkish National Team between 2005 and 2009, was the coach for Galatasaray (GS) football team in 1996. He brought 7 child footballers to the GS club from Ghana in 1996. One of them, Richard Kingson, was renamed as Faruk Gürsoy by becoming a Turkish citizen in 1998 and became the goal keeper of Ankaraspor, a team in the Turkcell Super League, in the 2006/07 season. He continues his career in the Premier League at the present time. Another was Stephen Appiah, who was 16 when he arrived. After a few years, Appiah returned to Turkey from Juventus and played for Fenerbahçe (FB). While fans were able to follow the careers of these two football players via press and other media, related media studies for that period indicate that no information relating to the fates of the other five Ghanaian football players has been published in the press (İnal 2008).

Migrant Football Players and Racism

Adopting citizenship in the country of emigration is a continuing topic in international sports labor emigration. In this sense, it is worth examining Turkish public opinion regarding this issue in 2006. Two sportsmen of Brazilian origin changed their names and became Turkish citizens, and they were included in the squad at the level of the national football team. Marcio Ferreira Perreira Nobre became Mert Nobre, playing for Beşiktaş (BJK), and Marco Aurelio Brito Das became Mehmet Aurelio, playing for FB. There was criticism from some sportswriters, claiming that such players could not be accepted as a “Turk”: “*This man does not know the language, traditions and the ways; he cannot find his house after leaving the training ground if you leave him alone, but he takes his place in national team just one day after becoming a citizen for the sake of the quota of ‘seventh foreign’, even while he couldn’t find Turkey on the map of the world*” (Alkan 2006). These football players choosing to gain a place in another country, together with “some values of the national identity” of this country by changing their name, were accepted to a certain extent after successfully fulfilling certain conditions within the football system. If these football players had not been “successful”, initial reactions to them might have been racist discourse on the nationality and ethnicity of the

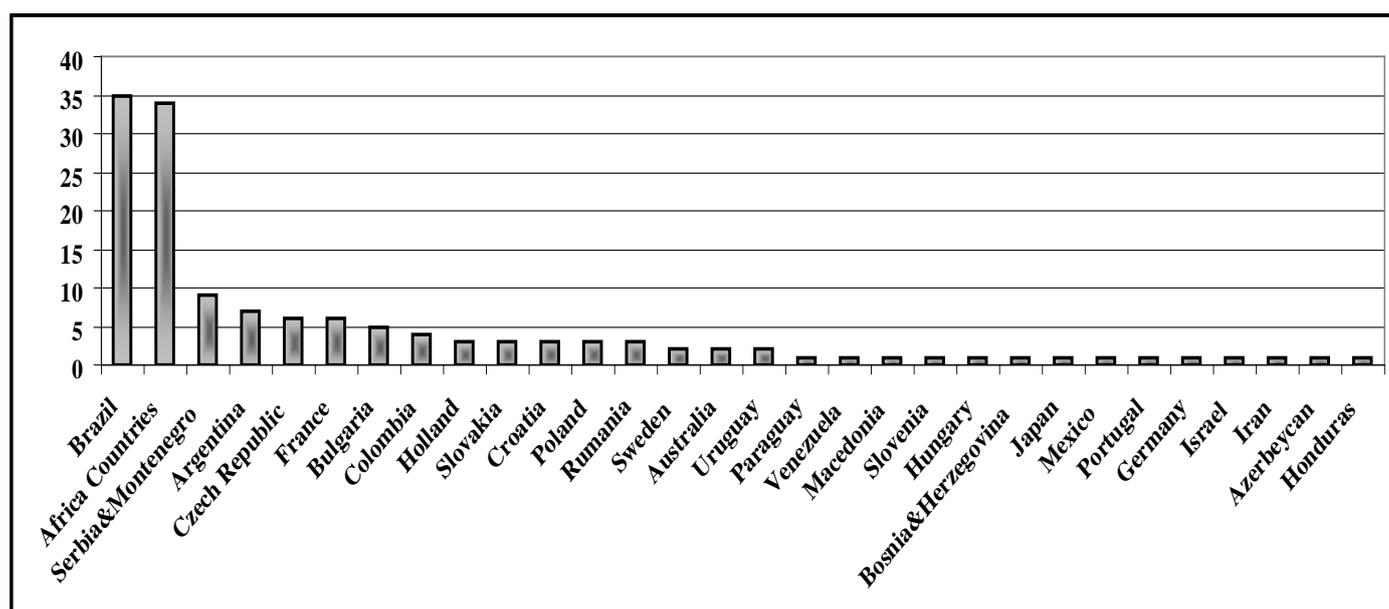


Figure 1. Countries of origin of migrant players in the Turkcell Super League (2006/2007).

players by those regarding themselves as of “superior nation and race”. There is ample evidence that racism exists in Turkey; attacks on migrant players through football, actions taken during international matches and general discourse support this.

M. Ali Yılmaz is a former president of Trabzonspor (TS) (of the Turkcell Super League). The comment that he made to the press about African football player Kevin David Campbell after a football match defeat in 1999 is a striking summary of this type of discourse: “*They demanded a goal scorer from us; we took a cannibal, but it did not work*” (Şahin, 1999). Yılmaz classified the African football player as a member of an “inferior race” by describing him as a “cannibal”. In addition, he has categorized African people “nearly as those who can be traded just like a slave”. This is blatant racism. This person - who was the minister of state between 1991 and 1995, and who is still the honorary president of the same club was not reprimanded or disciplined in any way for these public statements. Additionally, Yılmaz then defended himself: “I wanted to say ‘Arabian’ to him!” (Eğin 2007). Only a few sports writers defended the rights of this migrant football player insulted because of his nationality and color, and said that the mentioned statements were racist (Dilek 2005). Campbell had to leave Turkey as an insulted player in this way.

Following a match in 2002, Ali Aydın, the referee, insulted BJK sports club’s French football player Pascal Oiver Nouma who is of Senegalese origin, by calling him “negro”. The BJK sports club demanded an apology; Aydın complied and the matter was dropped without the referee being penalized (Hürriyet Gazetesi 2002).

Migrant Football Player Market

In Turkish football, migrant status exists just for the Turkcell Super League and the Bank Asya 1st League, and there is a quota. The maximum number of migrant football players who can play in a match is 6. Migrant football players cannot play in 2nd and 3rd leagues (www.tff.org). There are many African emigrants trying to play football in higher leagues. Football manager Kester Ezuma who came to Turkey from Nigeria in 2001, said that Nigerian, Cameroonian and Ghanaian football players aged between 17 and 21 and who are

waiting to be discovered in Kasımpaşa Stadium will continue to train in and out of season in order to stay in form, though they do not play for any club. They are ready to play for 300-400 dollars amount if they can find a club (Sarıbaş 2001).

The issue of the migrant quota is under constant discussion in the Turkcell Super League and the Bank Asya 1st League. Increasing the number of migrant players is not a simple matter. Those who are pro-quota increase argue that the low quota results in football to “receiving a limited economic input” from the “outside” and leads to inequality in the competition with European clubs, and that it also increases the cost of domestic football players. If the migrant quota is eliminated, sports clubs can hire cheaper football players from abroad, and so that can also increase the revenues of the clubs (İnal 2008).

Just as many European sports clubs go into a partnership with clubs in African leagues, the direction of skill determination is heading towards a club-based system and away from a national-based system, which increasingly looks to the (soccer) periphery rather than domestic youth (Maguire and Pearton 2000).

But in these debates, migrant football players are discussed as assets and it is completely forgotten that they are just “human beings”. İlhan Cavcav, president of Gençlerbirliği, one of the Turkish Premier Super League clubs, has been bringing migrant football player to the country since 1992. He prefers African countries. He says that he does them a “favor” because there are fewer sports opportunities in these players’ home countries. Cavcav does not conceal his strategy of selling the football players whom he buys cheaply with very high prices. He still complains about these transactions, though, saying that football players gain more profit than their clubs (Haskebacı 2000).

Cavcav expressed his complaint in the statement to the press on 9th June 2009 as follows: “*We have 19 foreign players in our two teams. We are already thinking about what to do. It seems that we will sell those, whom we bought with money, with weight. As the people who sell export surplus textile products in bazaars, we will sell the surpluses by saying it costs that much if it weighs 2 kilos and it costs this much if it weighs three kilos.*” (Ata 2009).

The migrant football players who play in this club stated that they will apply to FIFA and UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) if he does not

apologize for his insulting and humiliating words. There has been no indication that the club president was sanctioned in any way, and during the writing of this article (Sping 2010), he remains unpunished, according to press observations.

It seems inconceivable that this is just the surface of what exists for migrant football players and here, in this nation, that is also a signer of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Conclusion

After a certain stage of capitalism's appearance on the world scene, sports became an ideological auxiliary instrument packaged like any other goods produced for market; and then converted into a commodity sold at great profit for the consumption of the masses (Doğan 2007). All of these phenomena have reached an unprecedented level as globalization takes place; indication not just a change of capitalism but also a definition of the brutalization of all relationships. Sports have turned into a cheap international market of labor devoid of security.

International sports labor migration has increased along with the production of sports equipment and the growth of other consumption chains. The human beings who participate in sports experience are loss of value by being exposed to the illegal transactions taking place in sports labor migrations and to the racist attacks in migration-receiving countries. Sports factory owners employ migrant players as cheap labor, particularly in football. A "sports worker" is produced from migrant football players; if they are good enough, they are sold to other clubs with high prices. "Child players" marketed to central football companies of Europe or to countries like Turkey considered as transition countries are turned into a "commodity", and this commodity is turned into "football stars". The "modern slave trade" is still present in football (Ling 2008). Rules introduced by FIFA against modern slave trade, i.e. illegal labor migration to participate in sports, and conducted illegally to bring down the costs are for visible sportsmen migrations. Where are those whom we seek but can not find because of the characteristic feature of illegal migration? What are they doing?

Globalization experiencing a pause due to the world-scale crisis at the present time has come to be

a process in which capitalist rules work unmercifully. Though migrant labor can be considered a burden during periods of economic crisis, it is seen as an asset in terms of the mobility of sports labor migration. This perception indicates that those (particularly managers of sports companies) who look at these fields as arenas of earning as well as of sport will continue to perpetuate mischief. The issue of sports labor migration must be examined and followed vigilantly. While the migrant football players in Turkey make statements to the press about how happy they are in Turkey, here another side of football labor migration is presented. But the real answers are still not pursued or expressed adequately.

Notes

1. In all of the publications of Turkish Football Federation, migrant football players are known as "foreign football players".
2. Thanks warmly to Tevfik Taş for priceless comments on previous drafts of the article.

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