Our Piece of the Pie: Brazilian Football and Globalization

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Although Brazil continues to occupy a pivotal place in the contemporary football world, domestic football in Brazil has to negotiate with the new football world order dominated by club football of Europe, especially England, Spain and Italy. A process of transformation and destabilization within Brazilian football has already set in. Football in Brazil has been trying to cope with the pressure of commercialization and mediatization for quite some time now. The objective of this essay is to demonstrate the profound impact of globalization, which has only served to intensify the existing contradictions within Brazilian football.

Introduction

It was Saturday afternoon – the game was between two second-tier teams for the Rio de Janeiro state championship. São Cristóvão and Serrano were playing a game unworthy of Brazilian football, far below the dignified tradition that these two teams once had as members of the first division of the powerful Rio de Janeiro state football league. The stage was set on the pitch of the Olaria Atlético Clube on Rua Bariri in a suburb of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Behind me, an impassioned fan for São Cristóvão furiously swore at the black manager of his team, mixing insults with nasty jokes. He called the manager ‘Feijoada’ (literally, ‘black bean stew’, a racial slur), and when he looked at his watch, the fan loudly asked: ‘are you checking to see if it’s time to dance samba?’ Since it is not the goal of this essay to contemplate the peculiarities of Brazilian racism and how it is expressed on the pitch, I merely want to point out the contrast between the fan’s uncontrollable passion and the degree of professionalization and mercantilization that football has achieved. The fan himself was completely aware of this: he called the players ‘upstarts’, accusing them of having no love for the club, and only using São Cristóvão as their ‘showcase venue’. Even more aspersions were cast upon the manager: the fan accused ‘Feijoada’ of taking orders from an agent about which players should start. I was growing tired of the verbal assault when I spied a Raça Azul banner – the Serrano
fan club – in another section of the stands, so I made my way over there. A fan sporting
the club’s jersey asked me to take a picture of a corpulent but kind-looking gentleman.
He tells me that he is the club’s president. The ethnographer in me, out of professional
curiosity, asks how much Serrano players make. An unexpected answer is given: the
president can’t give me that information, since Serrano had rented out the pitch and
jersey to an agent. I had found the same thing on both sides of the bleachers.

Local explanations are few and far between in today’s world. What takes place on a
pitch in a regional match between two second-tier teams in a suburb of Rio is deter-
mined by global factors, which means that we have to start thinking about the specific-
ities of Brazilian football in terms of new paradigms for global sports. First, we need to
start with the classic definition of globalization provided by Anthony Giddens:

> an intensification of worldwide social relations, via which far away places are linked
together in such a way that events in one place are affected by processes taking place
many miles away, and vice versa.\(^2\)

This becomes clear when we return to Rua Bariri. At halftime of the match, in a discus-
sion with Olaria’s director, he claims that Flamengo was ‘really eager’ to hire two junior
squad members from Olaria. It wasn’t going to happen, he said, because the two ‘boys’
already had an agent who would take them to Portugal to try out for Boavista and
Porto. The existence of a global labour market for professional football players is unde-
niable. This new reality has had a profound impact on the continued existence and
operations of Brazilian clubs, since in football’s new world order, Brazil’s role is to
develop the ‘foot soldiers’ who will then be offered to the international market. We
once again recall Giddens’ words, when he warns us of the fact that globalization does
not imply homogenization and can actually lead to even deeper inequalities:

> Thus anyone studying cities today, in any part of the world, is aware that what
happens in a local neighbourhood is likely to be influenced by factors – such as global
money and commodity markets – operating at an indefinite distance away from that
neighbourhood. The outcome is not necessarily, or even usually, a generalised set of
changes in a uniform direction, but rather consists of mutually opposed trends. The
increasing prosperity of an urban area in Singapore might be causally related, via a
complicated network or global economic ties, to the impoverishment of a neighbour-
hood in Pittsburgh whose local products are uncompetitive in world markets.\(^3\)

In short, it may be that the exuberant prosperity enjoyed by commercial football in the
most important hubs (England, Spain, Italy, German and France, among the top) has
had the complete opposite effect on Brazil (and on other countries). Obviously, the way
that this global process will affect Brazil depends on the existing structure for Brazilian
football, in place prior to the intensification of the transformations generated by
globalization. The five-time world champion is caught in a paradox. The Brazilian
national team, which has won two of the last three World Cups, was considered a safe
bet for winning the 2006 Cup in Germany. Ronaldinho Gaúcho is the latest example of
a Brazilian player chosen as best footballer in the world by FIFA. On the home front,
however, Brazilian football is facing a serious crisis.

Today we are witnessing a violent process of transformation and destabilization
within Brazilian football. With the uninterrupted haemorrhage of good and even
middling players, attracted by the international market, national championships are weakened and even the most traditional clubs are facing crises, generating protests and frustration among fans. The significant drop in match attendance causes clubs to be increasingly dependent on money earned from television broadcasting rights, which in turn affects the club’s own independence. Football clubs and federations continue to be run by amateurs and opportunists who are unprepared, and oftentimes corrupt. The referees, under the complete control of the federations and their directors, are increasingly less reliable, and only add to the scandals concerning the ‘sale of match outcomes’.\[4\] The value of football merchandising on both the sports paraphernalia market and television applies a certain amount of pressure (in the name of safety) to ‘domesticate’ the fans that play a new role as consumers. The police are invited to aid in this task, and one sees the assemblage of a surveillance and control structure that threatens to violate civil rights.

The objective of this essay is to demonstrate the profound impact of globalization, which has only served to intensify the existing contradictions faced for many years now within Brazilian football. We shall start with a brief review of how global sports have developed and the role that football plays within this system.

**Global Sports**

In a lecture at a congress of sports historians in 1978, Pierre Bourdieu made particular note of the need to understand the historical and social conditions that had given rise to the field of sports, understood as being ‘a system of institutions and agents directly or indirectly linked to the existence of practice and consumption related to sports’.\[5\] This progressive creation of a ‘field of professionals who produce sporting goods and services’ is enhanced by the ‘development of a sports spectacle completely separate from common sports’.\[6\] The process foreseen by Bourdieu almost 30 years ago has now reached incalculable dimensions. These days, we can speak of a global field of sports of which *new* institutions and agents are a part. For instance, we may refer to specialized sports channels around the world, the wide variety of merchandise sold on all continents, the multinational corporations that produce sports-related items, and the new media – such as streaming video and the Internet – which provide unprecedented means for consuming the sports spectacle. In the United States, undoubtedly the first country where the sports spectacle reached full maturity, professional sports account for the tenth largest industry in the world, generating US$220 billion annually.\[7\]

The economic importance of the sports spectacle in the United States, and in the rest of the world, needs to be explained in light of the peculiarities of capitalism in modern times. According to Fredric Jameson, we can state that the functional logic of contemporary capitalism is cultural: it would be impossible to keep the system fully functional without a ‘production’ of needs, without making the superfluous essential.\[8\] Otherwise, capitalism would face an unprecedented crisis of over-production. This is why it is fundamental to bring about a magical transformation of luxury items into ‘essential needs’, stimulating the consumer logic that keeps the system running. In
order to do so, advertising has to appeal to the subconscious, to the irrational; in the end, it has to touch emotions. We have to recall the classic theory of Norbert Elias, according to whom sports are a ‘search for excitement’ in a society where the need to internalize emotional control is growing ever larger.[9]

Therefore, there is no better way than sports to sell not only products, but the very core values of contemporary capitalism, which are associated with speed, youth, competition, success and beauty. Think about the advertising that we are bombarded with on a daily basis, and the role that our global sports idols play in this process, since today, they are the most important global pop icons. There was a good reason that CNN called Michael Jordan ‘the right tool for global marketing’. [10]

Long before Michael Jordan and his ‘flying’ sneakers, there was Pelé and his German cleats. As far back as 1970, he pocketed US$120,000 to use Puma football cleats. During kick-off in World Cup play, Pelé deliberately sank to the ground to tie his shoes at the request of the company’s sales representative. [11] We have to keep in mind that live television broadcasting of World Cup games had begun four years prior, in 1966, but it was only in 1970, with the development of satellite technology, that the games were broadcast internationally to dozens of countries in Europe and South America, including Brazil. [12] And it was this union – between television and sports marketing – that was responsible for the economic revolution that football underwent, which led to its full incorporation into a capitalist system, as Marcelo Proni has so adroitly explained:

Despite having been transformed into a sport for the masses, it was still impossible for millions of people to watch it at the same time, the spectacle had not yet been sold for millions of dollars, a team couldn’t be traded on the stock market, and it was hard for a player to make his fortune playing ball. So you could say, before television and sports marketing transformed the spectacle of football into a globally transmitted and consumed product, before companies were set up to manage the business, the mere existence of the professional set, the sale of tickets and the negotiation of players’ ‘transfer fees’ did not imply the existence of typical capitalist relationships. [13]

In addition to television’s impact, mention must also be made of the 1974 investiture of the Brazilian João Havelange as FIFA president. It was then that the largest football organization in the world turned its attention toward an aggressive and successful campaign to turn football into a mega-business. That became all too clear when FIFA established relationships with large multinationals such as Adidas and Coca-Cola, which have been partners of this association since the mid-1970s. [14] To have an idea of how much the product controlled by this multinational organization is worth, the television broadcasting rights for the next World Cup alone should earn upwards of US$1.7 billion. [15]

**Football as the Flagship of the ‘Entertainment Industry’**

Football today is the most popular sport on the entire planet. As humorously observed by Spanish philosopher Carlos Zubieta:

> Over the past few years, football has become unavoidable. It has moved beyond the confines of stadiums, and invaded every land. It is the star of communications
networks; the focus of daily conversations; certain people are obsessed; for many, it is a reason to live and a complete nightmare for the few that don’t get the sport (...)

Unbidden, football has become part of our daily lives. In a short period of time, football has been transformed from something extraordinary that took place on Sunday afternoons into our daily bread.[16]

Today football serves as a veritable lingua franca, transcending all divisions and borders. Historically known for its passion and collective fury, football has become the flagship of the entertainment industry and the central focus of countless advertising campaigns, where it has been employed to sell just about anything you can imagine. The flexibility of football merchandise allows it to be sold or advertised in a variety of different forms: on TV, on streaming wireless (a new and very promising market), various types of video games (including those that simulate the ‘management’ of teams’ finances), specialty magazines, trading cards and sites exclusively dedicated to the game (matches, goals, game highlights). To say nothing of the wide variety of products that clubs make use of – which have now been transformed into brands – and their logos.

It is through this logic of transforming the world’s biggest clubs into ‘global brands’ that we can understand why European clubs are casting their eyes east, covetous of the Asian market. Let us not forget that local players are hired with the same intentions in mind.

On the one hand, football has been migrating from the sports pages in newspapers and is now spending time in the economic section, with stories about the financial market and the stock exchanges (many clubs are now corporations). On the other hand, when one reads the sports page, one often gets the impression these days that one is reading the economic section, given the number of stories about contracts, licensing, marketing, purchases, sales, loans and even mortgages.[17] 

Lance!, the most popular daily sports periodical in Brazil, with a circulation of a hundred thousand at the newsstands (in addition to being one of the most popular sites on the Brazilian Internet), regularly prints a column entitled EsporteBizz. As the name implies, the column deals exclusively with football-related business. We cannot blame the paper, though, since good journalistic coverage of football these days necessarily must include the economic aspect of the game, in light of its transformation into big business. Representation of this mercantilization in the press is not be perceived as neutral, however, as it also contributes toward the construction of this reality. Like it or not, with every news story, fans grow further accustomed to the idea of football as a business, perfectly adapted to neoliberal times.

Let us now measure the impact that both this new sports construct and global football have on Brazil. The existence of global sports implies competition at a planetary level, in a system where the elements are interconnected as well as interdependent. The full implementation of the football-corporation in some European football hubs was brought about through the transformation of football into a key marketing strategy for the entertainment industry.[18] This process, however, concentrated resources, and consequently the best players, into very few countries in Europe, and even within these countries, into the most important clubs. In a system powered by the logic of competition, inequalities tend to become increasingly acute. The changes happening in Brazil,
therefore, will be the fruit of a relationship between the local and the global. We shall now take a moment to examine this transformative dynamic within the scope of Brazilian football over the last few decades.

Thirty-year Crisis

Thirty years ago, the press had already declared the bankruptcy, decadence and profound crisis faced by Brazilian football.[19] Even before that, in 1963, the unforgettable journalist João Saldanha had decided that organization within our football leagues was ‘archaic’ and ‘obsolete’. [20] A contributing factor within Brazilian sports, specifically football, was the fact that it was tightly controlled and manipulated by the state, and had been that way since the outset of the 1940s. The first national club championship was only held in 1971. [21] It is no coincidence that this first Brazilian national championship was played during the military dictatorship, which was very concerned about ‘national integration’. The use of football as a political tool became exceedingly clear through the increase of the number of clubs playing in the national championship, which rose from 20 in the first year to 40 different clubs in 1973, 54 in 1976, 74 in 1978 and an unimaginable 94 clubs in 1979! Obviously, the quality of the games and the average number of spectators fell at a rate inversely proportional to the influx of participating clubs (see Figure 1). This led to crushing losses for the largest and most important Brazilian football clubs. The single-vote straightjacket at state federations – instituted by the military dictatorship in 1975 – however, prevented large clubs from organizing more attractive and profitable competitions. This marked the beginning of the fundamental crisis in Brazilian football.

In Brazil, the 1980s are called the ‘lost decade’ owing to serious economic recessions, an increase in unemployment and hyperinflation, which rose from 200 per cent in 1984 to an inconceivable peak of 1,765 per cent in 1989. The structure of Brazilian football...
football remained the same: strong state control, thwarted innovation, irrational schedules, state federations controlled by the same directors for decades, championships that ran in the red, as well as growing violence in and around the stadiums. Concomitant to these developments, the main national leagues in Europe, mainly in Italy and Spain, underwent reorganization and experienced increased professionalism, which led to an immediate economic impact. The result is what one would expect: starting in the 1980s, Brazilian players began leaving in droves (see Figure 2), reaching a record number (at that point) of 227 athletes transferring to teams abroad in 1988.

This was the start of the vicious cycle that continues in full force in modern times: structural factors weaken clubs, which are then obliged to sell players, reducing the quality of the games, as well as the identification and emotions of the fans, which aggravates the crisis and makes the sale of our stars inevitable. This is not to suggest that the loss of our best players to the wealthy global football market sparked this situation. Any way one looks at it, though, the haemorrhage of talent threatens the very survival of Brazilian football, because it threatens our greatest asset: the passion that fans have for their clubs, which is simply unthinkable without their idols.

In 1987, an attempt was made to reverse this situation, when some of the most important Brazilian football clubs founded an association that received the name of Clube dos 13.[22] Disgusted with the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) and its disastrous management of Brazilian football in general, and the national championship in particular, these clubs threatened to leave the CBF to create their own league. The definitive break did not come to pass, but the Clube dos 13 was able to organize a much more rational and even handed national championship, disputed by 16 clubs, instead of the 48 from the previous year. Spectator averages rose 55 per cent, from 13,423 in 1986 to 20,877 in 1987, which accounted for the second highest viewer average in the history of the Brazilian championship. Additionally, the Clube dos 13
negotiated a sponsorship contract with Coca-Cola and sold broadcasting rights to the network TV Globo for the first time in Brazil. The progress made was lost the following year, unfortunately: the number of clubs increased (to 24), and Globo broke its five-year contract with the Clube dos 13. Throughout the 1990s, a series of attempts were made to modernize Brazilian football.[23] We do not have room here to detail the entire process, but the important point to understand is that Brazilian football continued to be a hybrid organization, the fruit of incomplete modernization. Which is to say: clubs negotiated sponsorship deals and sold television broadcasting rights, but they have been run by amateurs who manage to stay in power, re-elected term after term. The same thing happens in the CBF, where numerous terms have been presided over by the former son-in-law of the powerful João Havelange. This ‘mixed model’ is incapable of combating growing international competition for talent, obliging clubs to sell their best players to no productive end, weakening the fundamental relationship with fans, further feeding the crisis. Nowadays, the sale of the best players accounts for approximately 20 per cent of the revenue earned by top-tier Brazilian football clubs.[24] The exodus of Brazilian players is a matter that will now be examined more closely.

**Bye-bye Brazil**

In 2004 alone, according to official data published by the Brazilian Football Confederation, 857 football players were transferred to teams in other countries. That is an average of more than two players leaving the country per day. In 2004, 132 players went to Portugal, which happens to be the same number as the total transfers to the whole world for the entire year of 1989 (see Figure 2). The Japanese come in second among ‘buyers’, acquiring 35 players, followed closely by the Germans with 30 players, and the South Koreans with 29. The list is quite long[25] – 80 countries are represented, whereby Brazilian players have been transferred to the four corners of the globe: 12 to Azerbaijan, eight to Surinam, one to New Zealand, 17 to Vietnam…

The most powerful global championship, the European Champions League, today employs 71 Brazilians in 23 of the 32 clubs that compete in the league. Brazilian players account for 7 per cent of the total of 979 players registered, which happens to be the same number of Italians playing, with the minor detail that there are four Italian clubs in the league. It is rather likely that the national team representing Brazil in Germany will have at the most two athletes that actually play in Brazil. The 1982 Cup had the exact opposite proportion: 20 players played in Brazil, and only two played abroad.

In order to provide an idea of the impact that this bloodletting of players has had on clubs, we ought to examine the case of the Fluminense Football Club. With one of the longest traditions in Brazilian football, Fluminense was the Brazilian champion in 1984 and among the Rio teams that had won the most state titles. Yet, during the first half of 2005, Fluminense battled for and won the Rio de Janeiro State Championship with a team comprised almost exclusively of players trained in their farm leagues. In August, just a few months after the Brazilian Championship starts, six players had
already been traded: Antonio Carlos (Ajaccio, France), Diego (Benfica, Portugal), Fabiano Eller (Trapzonspor, Turkey), Léo Guerra (Naval 1o. de Maio, Portugal) and Marcão (Al-Arabi, Qatar). In the same story, the sports daily *Lance!* reported another two players had received proposals: Arouca (from a German football team) and Gabriel (from Italy, Spain and England).[26] With this ‘dismantling’, the formerly excellent Fluminense team performed quite poorly in the Brazilian championship, and it was only able to recover after it trade for a Serb, Petkovic. It is no coincidence that the winner of the 2005 National Championship was Corinthians, a team that did not lose players and actually purchased a number of stars, including three Argentines, among them the striker Tevez – who was named MVP of the competition. Corinthians, however, is the exception that proves the rule. The team was funded by money of questionable origin through the company Media Sport Investment Limited Group, which is reputedly connected to Boris Beretovski, a Russian millionaire sentenced to 20 years in prison in his homeland for fraud and participation in organized crime. A judge in the 36th District Court of São Paulo published a ruling which stated ‘State prosecutors assert, based on overwhelming evidence found throughout the investigation, that the MSI Corinthians partnership is being used to launder money’. [27]

Brazilian players have been going to Europe for more than 70 years. Between 1929 and 1941, 26 Brazilian players transferred to Italy. In the 1933–34 season, no fewer than 19 Brazilians played on Italian pitches.[28] Lazio, with 12 Italian-Brazilians, was called the Brasilazio. Two Brazilians were even chosen to play on the Italian national team. Brazilian players were transferred in smaller numbers during the 1930s to Spain and Portugal. After the Second World War, there was a period of relative calm in terms of Brazilians transferring to other countries, in large part owing to the restrictions now imposed by Italy and Spain, the largest importers. This rate would only start rising again during the 1950s after Brazil’s World Cup victory in 1958.[29]

In an analysis of Figure 2, which demonstrates the transfer of Brazilian players to foreign teams between 1989 and 2005, we see that the tremendous outflow begins in 1996, the year when the number of departures increases 50 per cent in comparison with 1995’s numbers, plus a further 68 per cent between 1996 and 1997. This increase is not coincidental. It was at the end of 1995 that the Belgian player Jean-Marc Bosman won his case before the European Court of Justice, sparking a veritable revolution on the European players market.[30] For the purpose of this report, we want to emphasize just one of the consequences of the Bosman case – as it became known: after that point, within countries that are part of the European Union, football players are to be treated in accordance with the same laws that apply to normal workers. The restrictions (in terms of the number of foreign players per club, for example) imposed by national federations no longer applied to ‘union members’ (that is, the players of any one of the 25 countries that comprise the European Union). In practice, a club like Internazionale de Milano or Chelsea could have an unrestricted number of French, Portuguese, Spanish, Germans, etc., since these players are ‘European’ workers, and they enjoy the same liberty to compete on the European Community’s labour market unrestrictedly.
Previously, a French player for Internazionale or Chelsea was counted as a ‘foreigner’, the number of which were limited, given the quota of foreign players allowed per club. Since Europeans do not count as foreigners anymore, this opened the door for players from what are now called extra-community countries, which is to say, countries that do not belong to the European Union. The result: an explosion in the number of South Americans and Africans playing for European clubs. In Italy, for example, the number of South American players more than quadrupled between 1994–95 (pre-Bosman season) and 1999–2000, increasing from 17 to 75. The number of African players hired by European clubs grew more than eight times during the same period, from three to 26.[31] In the 2005/06 season of the Italian champion’s league, 150 of the players are foreign, a good one-fifth of those being Brazilian.[32]

The consequences of this football Diaspora are hard to fully quantify, although some elements within this situation are quite clear. On the one hand, the abandonment by our stars (and other good players) has caused the technical level of the football played in Brazil to fall. The consequence is low turnout at the stadiums. In 2004, the average number of spectators for Series A games within the Brazilian Championship was 8,085 paying fans, which is the lowest average since the Brazilian championship began in 1971 (see Figure 1). This worrisome number is much lower than the average number of fans in the most powerful European national champions leagues (2004–05 season): France 21,391, Italy 25,788, Spain 28,624, England 33,916, and Germany 37,719,[33] but it is important to note that the Brazilian championship in the past has had a turnout of more than 20,000 paying fans on at least four different occasions: in 1971, 1980, 1983 and again in 1987. If we analyse by decade, we see that the major drop in numbers starts in the 1990s, when the average falls to 12,600 after the first 20 years when the number of paying fans was nearly 15,000 (14,907 in the 1970s and 17,021 in the 1980s). During the first five years of the new century, the average is even lower: 11,358.

Obviously, many different factors led to this drop in spectators: poor administration, violence both within and outside the stadium’s walls, the demoralization of Brazilian football following a spate of scandals, as well transformations within Brazilian society itself: increased unemployment and the progressive decimation of the working class. However, it is probably safe to say that the broad array of international and domestic games broadcast on television is an important factor in this reduction. Even in England, which has the wealthiest championship in the world, replete with international stars, spectatorship has been falling as the audience of televised games continues to grow.[34] In Brazil, in addition to national-championship games (some on network television, and all available through ‘pay-per-view’), every weekend cable television broadcasts approximately a dozen games from the English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch and Portuguese leagues. All told, 400 international football games are broadcast, which averages out to more than one a day. These statistics do not even begin to take into consideration the wide variety of other sports available: American football, the NBA, baseball, volleyball, indoor football, beach football and so on.

Television has also contributed in another way toward the scarcity of spectators by scheduling games at times most convenient to broadcasters: the Globo network
normally shows games at 9.45 p.m. during the week, because this is the time when popular night-time soap operas end. Obviously, there is no special transportation or security setup for the heroic fans who struggle to get home before midnight; not to mention working the next day. On Sundays, the nearly sacred time of 5.00 p.m. was changed to 4.00 p.m. and 6.10 p.m., once again, as dictated by television networks, which are the predominant investors for the competition. Sometimes, television broadcasters even determine where the match will be played. In other words, the spectator is not important, but the television viewer is. Added to this are crackerjack competitions designed almost exclusively to fill up the television schedule (for example, the South American Cup).

**Bankrupt Clubs Inc.**

Flamengo’s *Clube de Regatas* is so much more than just a football club. Nearly 15 per cent of all Brazilians are *flamenguistas* (Flamengo fans), which adds up to more than 25 million people. Wherever you go in Brazil, whenever Flamengo plays, the stadium will be full, and a good number of those fans will cheer for Flamengo over the local team. The club has won the Brazilian championship the most times, having earned five national titles. The ‘holy cape’, as fans like to call their ruby and black jerseys, has been worn by players of the calibre of Domingos da Guia, Leônidas, Zizinho, Gérson, Zico, Bebeto and Romário. Even so, Flamengo’s *Clube de Regatas* is the largest debtor of all Brazilian teams, which led its president to state: ‘It’s up to R$139 million (roughly 52 million euros), even if we sold everything we have, down to our boats and even the photographs of former presidents, we would still owe money.’[35] The irony is that on the Brazilian national team that played in the qualifying rounds for the 2006 World Cup, there were no less than four players who had cut their teeth with Flamengo: Júlio César (Internazionale), Juan (Bayer Leverkusen), Gilberto (Hertha Berlin) and Adriano (Internazionale).

The situation faced by the ‘most beloved team in Brazil’ is not unique. Practically every Series A club in the Brazilian Champions League has its earnings earmarked to pay off debts. Even Corinthians, under the management of MSI Limited Group, had to mortgage its own stadium to guarantee payment of a court-ordered debt.[36] Employees of these clubs are accustomed to not being paid on time, sometimes not for three or four months. For a Brazilian footballer, oftentimes a transfer abroad is not just a matter of a better salary, it also means you will receive your salary in a timely fashion. For the clubs, on the other hand, selling their players for any sum is often the only way to balance their budget, or even continue to exist. As the best players leave, people stop watching, which affects ticket sales and further weakens the clubs.

Globo, the current owner of the Brazilian Championship, is also creditor to many of Brazil’s traditional clubs, to which it makes advances on payments for game broadcasts.[37] While clubs are literally broke and fan attendance dwindles, ratings for TV Globo continue to grow each year for games in the Brazilian Championship, having reached an impressive rating of 28 per cent for 2005.[38]
More dramatic is the fact that the data related to the export of Brazilian players are just the tip of the iceberg. The numbers presented in Figure 2 represent players over 16 years of age, which is the minimum age required to sign a professional player contract in accordance with Brazilian legislation. In reality though, Brazilian players are hounded from childhood: Porto, Bordeaux and Manchester United have already demonstrated interest in Juan Carlos Chera, 9 years old, who just transferred to Santos from a small club in the state of Paraná; the current phenom at Santos, Neymar, who is just 13 years old, signed a contract with Nike and is already represented by the same agent as Robinho and Wagner Ribeiro.[39] Although Brazilian child-labour laws prevent anyone under the age of 14 from working, foreign clubs have the alternative of ‘hiring’ the entire family, who move along with the star player.

A report presented by the Parliamentary Inquiry Commission in Brazil’s lower Congressional House, which initially investigated the contract between Nike and the Brazilian Football Confederation, contains a chapter entitled ‘The “Gato” Factory – Falsification of identities and the trafficking of minors to other countries’. [40] The report describes a criminal ring that transfers minors to unimportant clubs in Belgium, which involves the falsification of passports and other documents. The situation has grown so bad that in July 2005, FIFA decided that transfers for players under the age of 18 would be examined on a case-by-case basis.[41] FIFA’s President, Sepp Blatter, in an article aptly published in the Financial Times on 11 October 2005,[42] makes direct mention of the case of young Brazilians and an indirect allusion to money laundering that is allegedly responsible for the entry of ‘pornographic’ amounts of money:

Football is now a multibillion-pound global industry. Unfortunately, the haphazard way in which money has flowed into the game – reminiscent of a misguided, wild-west style of capitalism – is having some seriously harmful effects (…)  

A few fortunate clubs, however, are richer than ever before (…) all too often, the source of this wealth is individuals with little or no history of interest in the game who happen upon football as a means of serving some hidden agenda. Having set foot in the sport seemingly out of nowhere, they proceed to throw pornographic amounts of money at it (…)  

… a new type of slavery has been spawned that should be opposed by everyone. This occurs when the ‘books’, or commercial rights, to young players, often Brazilians, are bought by speculators who generate a profit each time those players are subsequently sold. To FIFA, such transactions fall well short of the minimum standards of decency.[43]  

Today Brazilian football is seen as an enormous showcase for ‘footballers who aspire to play in Europe’, which ends up happening sooner or later, preferably, sooner. Leonardo Santiago, presently 21 years of age, who left to play for Feyenoord in Holland at the age of 11, put it like this: ‘football is a business, and we are the product’. [44] In 2005 Leonardo earned 40,000 euros a month – this in comparison to 60 per cent of the
professional players working in Brazil who earned a minimum salary each month worth approximately 113 euros.[45]

It is no surprise that Leonardo sees himself as a ‘product’. These days we already see ‘artificial’ clubs whose sole intent is to discover new talent to be negotiated, preferably with some European country. A good example of this type of club is the RS Futebol Clube, founded in 2001 and belonging to a company calling itself Talento Desportivo S/A, a private corporation.[46] This club does not want to win championships or even win over fans. The matches played by RS Futebol Clube are only good for two things: to train athletes to play at a competitive level and to act as a ‘showcase’ for its players. Sometimes Talento S/A uses traditional clubs (like Juventude from Caxias do Sul, which played at the highest level of the Brazilian Champions League in 2005) to display its athletes and to add value to them from a commercial standpoint. RS Futebol Clube is not alone on the market. In 2003, the Sao Paulo supermarket chain Pão de Açúcar created the Pão de Açúcar Esporte Clube. In 2004, the club inaugurated a Training Centre, which contains a gym, physical therapy rooms, lodging and four football fields. The under-20 players wear the Juventus jersey – a traditional club from the city of São Paulo.[47] Another traditional club, São Bento de Sorocaba, has an agreement with Desportivo Brasil, a business club belonging to the Traffic group (a sports marketing company), which just bought two football franchises in the United States.

Returning to the second division of Rio de Janeiro’s league, in the case of Serrano, these days it is managed by a company. This is just another form of the same type of business undertaken by RS Futebol Clube, Pão de Açúcar Esporte Clube, Desportivo Brasil and many others. Except with the latter, instead of ‘renting’, they created a club whose only objective is not to win championships, obtain titles, not in the slightest bit interested in garnering noisy, passionate and demanding fans. They are phantom clubs, whereby their only goal is to ‘display’ players to be sold to foreign teams.

Out of Step

The ill will, dissatisfaction, and, dare we say, disgust, of the São Cristóvão fan should not be viewed as an isolated opinion borne of a local quirk. Even among fans of the so-called ‘big clubs’,[48] the fan’s passion is evidently out of step with the current reality facing Brazilian football. Without question the logic employed by a fan and that of a professional footballer have never been on the same wavelength; the relationship between the two is uneasy, at best. Football was professionalized in Brazil in 1933, but almost two decades prior players were already receiving money to play, even if it wasn’t exactly a salary. In 1917 clubs in both Rio and Sao Paulo charged fees to watch matches.[49] For a long time, however (and to a certain extent still today) these professional footballers were expected to have ‘love for their jersey’, ‘dedication to the club’ or what the fans call raça (a mix of courage and identification). There is a kind of schizophrenia that emerges whenever a player, hired by a new club in a transaction that everyone knows is about money, poses for pictures that will be run in tomorrow’s paper, waving his new jersey and kissing the new club’s symbol. Oftentimes this is
reinforced by the classic interview, wherein the athlete reveals that – what a coincidence! – since he was a child, he has rooted for that very team ... Not to mention the theatrics employed in games in an attempt to convince fans that the player has really ‘adopted’ his club.

As Arlei Damo has poignantly noted, the relationship that a fan has with his team is romantic, often seen as eternal and definitive[50] (‘Once you root for Flamengo, you are for Flamengo until you die’, states the hymn of Flamengo’s Clube de Regatas). This loyalty and love for clubs has not diminished – to the contrary – which leads to a fundamental contradiction in light of the high turnover of athletes and growing ‘mercantile escalation’. The fan, never less than completely faithful, feels constant betrayal, which explains the ‘accusations of players as mercenaries, the ire, the threats of physical violence and other measures’. Beyond the decline in quality and the significance attached to the championships, Brazilian fans have been subjected to a process of increasing vigilance and control.

Civilizing or Domesticating? The Transformation of Fans into Consumers

The ‘symbolic war’ is an intrinsic part of football, but in the case of ‘organized fan clubs’ the war is often taken at its literal meaning. ‘Organized fan clubs’ first arose in Rio and São Paulo at the end of the 1960s, start of the 1970s. Comprised mainly of adolescents and young men under the age of 24, the rise of this movement should be placed within the context of activist and student protests that started in 1968. As ‘organized fan clubs’, people actively protested against club managements. In addition, they invented a new way to cheer for their teams in a much more emotional and involved manner, which includes choreography, special flags, banners, whistles, colourful balloons, a samba drum corps, as well as an extensive repertoire of songs and battle cries. Their presence breathed new life into Brazilian stadiums. At the same time, this juvenile ‘radicalization’ of the act of cheering carried along with it the dynamic of contrasting identification in relation to other organized fan groups, often times leading to group encounters both in and around the stadiums. ‘Capturing’ the flag or jersey of the ‘enemy’ became a valuable and worthwhile endeavour for these young people.

These days, as violence has become an increasingly familiar component in Brazilian society, violent confrontations have become more common among ‘factions’ (as they have dubbed themselves) of organized fans, sometimes while cheering for the same club. It’s not unusual for guns to be used, and fatalities have occurred.[52] Thus, although organized clubs have been responsible for a good portion of the beauty and emotion behind the modern football spectacle, they have also turned into a public-safety issue. We do not have the time herein to examine this issue with the attention it deserves,[53] but it should be noted that with the intent of repressing violence, a series of control and monitoring measures have been taken against all fans.

In 1991, a special police battalion was created in Rio de Janeiro: the ‘GEPE’ (Special Stadium Police Force). Currently staffed by 70 men, the GEPE, although designated to police any type of event held in a stadium or gymnasium such as volleyball and
basketball games that attract a large number of spectators, or even religious events, spends most its time policing football matches. In practice, this involves police work that focuses a great deal of attention on the ‘organized fan clubs’, the members of which are registered by the GEPE and closely watched before, during and after the matches. Additionally, the so-called JECRIMs (Special Criminal Courts) were set up first at Rio stadiums such as Maracanã, and now at São Januário, and Morumbi stadium in Sao Paulo, to hear and rule upon cases inside the stadium itself, concerning minor transgressions that may be fined or assigned alternative penalties (community service). These courts are also capable of blocking fans from entering the stadium during a certain period of time. The JECRINs were created by the Fan Statute (Law 10,671 from 15 May 2003).

This same law, in article 18 of Chapter IV, requires stadiums that hold more than 20,000 spectators to ‘maintain an information centre, with appropriate facilities to make it possible to monitor images of the public in attendance’. In other words, one of the ‘rights’ that a fan has is to be watched on a closed-circuit television. After a violent encounter involving Corinthians fans during a game against River Plate in May of 2006, organized fans clubs in São Paulo were barred from the stadiums for 90 days. At the time, the Minister of Sports spoke once again of the possibility of forcing members of organized fan clubs to carry tickets containing locator chips.[54] This measure had already been suggested for the 2006 Sao Paulo State Championship, but it was not implemented at the time.[55] Furthermore, studies are being carried out to make modifications to stadiums, which would include subdividing the seats into sectors that hold at the most three thousand people.[56] All of this means that we are growing ever closer to stadium-prisons, with the fan-consumer whose movements are being watched over, monitored and controlled. The act of rooting for one’s team is being criminalized. Obviously, Brazil is far from the situation currently faced in England, where fans struggle to maintain the right to stand up in their seats and cheer. But the person in charge of the Inter-Ministerial Commission on Peace in Sports, Marco Aurélio Klein, does not hide the fact that the English hooligan control model has inspired his entire ‘safety’ project: ‘England is our gold standard’. [57]

In GEPE’s case, the officer in charge has made use of a carrot-and-stick system for organized fan clubs:

we have a gentlemen’s agreement, whereby I punish the fans. We have … what they want … they’re just like kids, right, bad comparison, what they like, what they want: they like their banners, they like their flags, with the poles, they like their lights, they like their musical instruments, they like their whistles, they like … they have their banner-throwers, they like their paper-throwers, so I allow all of it, (…) Now … you screw up, you’re going to lose it. Screw up, and you lose your flags, you screw up you lose … not like we take it away from them; they can’t come in with it. We have the right to deny entry of objects, to reject the entry of materials that could cause problems, so we just keep banning and banning and banning.[58]

Obviously security is important, but it is in the name of security that punishment has been curbing the most positive aspect of the organized clubs, which is their intense festive participation in the spectacle. Concerned with possible sanctions, members of
these fan clubs have started policing themselves. Authorities are trying to guarantee ‘sterile’ football, an undisturbed television product, where fans and their most extreme displays appear as what communication theory refers to as noise. The project of transforming the fan into a consumer is explicitly laid out: in the same chapter XI, article 40 states that fan rights will follow ‘the same rules as in defence of consumer rights’.

In his interesting study about the modernization process within Brazilian stadiums, Antônio Holzmeister Oswaldo Cruz analyzes the most ‘modern’ Brazilian stadium, the Arena da Baixada (now Kyocera Arena).[59] The Arena can hold 38,000-seated spectators; it has 68 convenience stores and 60 internal security cameras. Boxes can be rented seasonally by companies or individuals, and there is a ‘VIP sector with 210 cushioned seats, adjacent to a large room where an exclusive restaurant will be constructed, with a view of the field’. In certain sectors of the stands, there are season tickets sold that give the fan the right to put his or her name on the seat. The board of Atlético Paranaense says that ‘the club doesn’t need any more fans, rather, it needs people who can appreciate the spectacle’, and as a result of this new philosophy, it has barred the entrance of fans with flags, drums, banners or t-shirts emblazoned with the names of the organized fan clubs. The anthropologist Antônio Holzmeister reported in his field journal on a match between Atlético Paranaense and Paraná, held in 2004:

when a Paraná player kicked the ball into the stands, it was promptly ‘hidden’ by an Atlético fan beneath his shirt. A few minutes later, I hear a voice over the loudspeaker: ‘Atlético fan wearing jersey number 23: you are being filmed, please return the ball immediately or you will be thrown out of the stadium!’ This order was promptly obeyed by the fan.

Tickets to the Arena are among the most expensive in Brazil, and the club president openly admits that the goal is to exclude the poorest fans.[62]

The poorest fans haven’t gone anywhere for a long time. Atlético is not responsible for social exclusion. Many of the people who complain are the ones who leave the stadium and go get drunk and attack other people.

However it must be added that the ‘organized’ fan clubs for Atlético Paranaense are resisting these measures. On the one hand, they continue to meet in a specific sector of the stadium and sing their songs and scream their war cries. At the same time, they have invented new devices to get around the ban on flags and banners. The fan club, Os Fanáticos, for example, brings massive Styrofoam skulls, a meter and a half in height, to the stadium. The vice-president says this: ‘Fans need to mark their territory, and now we are doing that with skulls’. In same journal, Holzmeister reports that during the majority of the match, fans watch the game standing up, scolding those who asked them to sit down: ‘go watch the match at home on the telly!’

Trading Cards

These days as you walk through the streets of Rio de Janeiro, it is just as easy (or even easier) to find Real Madrid jerseys as it is to find Botafogo jerseys; it may even be
easier to find someone wearing Kaká or Robinho’s jersey than for any footballer actually playing in Brazil. No doubt, this is a reflection of the typical Brazilian pride that we have when we see our stars playing victoriously in the most important leagues on the planet. Newspapers and television programmes closely follow the careers and performances of Brazilian players in Europe, in order to nourish our ‘football nationalism’. In sports periodicals like *Lancet!,* there are weekly columns dedicated exclusively to the performance of our stars ‘over there’. On every television programme that shows the ‘goals of the week’ in the European championship, every goal scored by a Brazilian is duly registered. The most popular sports programme in Brazil, ‘Globo Esporte’, also has a set time to show ‘Brazilian goals around the World’.

On 19 September 2005 an international company began selling trading cards for the first time for the Spanish championship. There are two ways of viewing this apparently insignificant fact. We could naturally see this as an expected consequence of the football globalization process. Without a doubt, this is a correct assessment. But we can also reflect that our passion for football is driven by a fan’s love for his or her club and that love needs its stars, those exceptional players who represent the club to its fanatic supporters. It could be that we are witnessing another revolution, wherein football restructures itself again through the rise of international fan clubs. But in this new football order, what is the role to be played by the vast majority of ‘local’ clubs, incapable of hiring global stars? All these clubs can do is train talented players like Ronaldinho Gaúcho, Kaká, Robinho and others then consume them as products of the new football industry: t-shirts, video games, televised games and now trading cards. This is our piece of the pie of what is globalized football.

Notes

[1] This is a former Flamengo and Fluminense player. Luís Antônio Vicente is the largest shareholder of the company Serra Futebol, which controls all football activities for the Serrano Football Club, including (and especially) the farm clubs.


[3] Ibid.

[4] The most recent, salacious and lamentable of these scandals took place during the 2005 Brazilian championship. A referee was charged with being involved in an Internet-based betting ring and that he had been bribed to fix the results of various matches in the Brazilian Championship. The president of the Supreme Court of Sports Justice, Luiz Zweiter, without consulting anyone, decided to annul the 11 matches refereed by Edilson Pereira de Carvalho. These 11 games were replayed, and, as expected, the new results changed the championship classification substantially. Corinthians ended up benefiting, which led to protests and a great deal of suspicion regarding the championship as a whole.


[16] Zubieta, Futbolsofía. Filosofar a través del fútbol (Footballsophy. Philosophize through Football.), 93.
[17] Benfica de Portugal offered five players as a guarantee against the payment of a debt to construct the new Stadium da Luz (Lance!, 2 August 2005).
[20] Ibid., 42.
[21] Despite this fact, there had already been a tournament of clubs from Rio and Sao Paulo since 1950. In 1967, a national championship started to emerge with a tournament of clubs from five states: Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Minas Gerais, Rio Grande do Sul and Paraná.
[22] The association was officially registered with the name ‘Big Brazilian Club Union’ and it is comprised even today by the following groups: Sao Paulo, Flamengo, Corinthians, Vasco, Palmeiras, Fluminense, Santos, Botafogo, Cruzeiro, Atlético, Grêmio, Internacional and Bahia. These 13 clubs together have over 80 per cent of the fans from all of Brazil and nearly all of the national titles since 1971. For a superb analysis of the story surrounding the foundation of the Clube dos 13, see Helal, Passes e impasses, 84–101.
[23] For an excellent analysis of this ‘incomplete modernisation process’, see Proni, A metamorfose do futebol.
[25] Here is a complete list of the countries, in alphabetical order: Albania (7); Angola (3); Argentina (10); Austria (7); Azerbaijan (12); Bahrain (1); Belgium (17); Bosnia-Herzegovina (3); Bulgaria (2); Canada (2); Chile (1); China (13); Colombia (3); Costa Rica (3); Croatia (4); Cyprus (3); Czech Republic (6); Denmark (6); Ecuador (8); Egypt (1); El Salvador (6); England (5); Faroe Islands (3); Finland (6); France (23); Gabon (3); Georgia (1); Germany (30); Greece (28); Guatemala (7); Holland (3); Honduras (8); Hong Kong (5); Hungary (5); India (5); Indonesia (26); Iran (2); Israel (16); Italy (27); Japan (35); Korea (3); Kuwait (6); Lebanon (12); Libya (2); Macedonia (3); Malaysia (13); Malta (1); Mexico (20); Mozambique (3); Moldavia (5); New Zealand (1); Nicaragua (1); Norway (2); Panama (1); Paraguay (23); Peru (4); Poland (7); Portugal (132); Qatar (6); Russia (9); Saudi Arabia (15); Serbia and Montenegro (1); Slovakia (11); Slovenia (3); South Korea (29); Spain (20); Sudan (2); Surinam (8); Sweden (21); Switzerland (22); Thailand (2); Trinidad and Tobago (2); Tunisia (1); Turkey (6); Ukraine (7); United Arab Emirates (13); United States (19); Uruguay (10); Venezuela (15); Vietnam (17).
[27] Lance!, 18 June 2005.
[28] Lafranchi and Taylor, Moving with the Ball, 83.
[30] Bosman appealed to common-law courts in 1990 after RC Liège, a second-division team from Belgium, lowered his salary and kept him from playing in France. At the end of five years, the European Court System ruled in his favour and established new case law. Henceforth, once a contract ends, players no longer need a free-agent certificate from their ex-club. Within this spirit of viewing footballers as workers just like any other, and, as such, governed by the same laws in Europe, ‘European’ players (that is, with EU passports) could not be treated as foreigners and were free of restrictions that national leagues had established in terms of a maximum number of foreign players per team. Now only the ‘extra-community’ players (that
is, those without a European passport) are limited in number. This new legislation obviously created many ‘foreigner’ spots for players from Latin America and Africa.

[31] Lafranchi and Taylor, Moving with the Ball, 223.


[34] The audience for the first ten games of the Premiership (1st Division of the English Championship) broadcast by BSkyB in 2005 reached 1.1 million, in comparison with an average of 988,000 viewers for the games broadcast during the same period the previous year. David Owen, ‘More armchair fans watch top football despite clubs’ concerns’, Financial Times, 24 September 2005.


[37] Even in the case of the top Series A ticket champ for 2005, Corinthians, the amount collected from ticket sales accounted for just 23.8 per cent of monthly revenues, while 34.5 per cent was funded by sponsors (Nike and Samsung), the majority from television broadcasting rights, which accounts for 41.7 per cent of the total. These calculations were made based upon the story ‘MSI commemorates its first month’s profits’, Folha de São Paulo, 22 August 2005.

[38] Lance!, 4 October 2005.


[40] ‘Gato’ ['Cat'] is Brazilian football slang for a player who has had his birth certificate falsified to appear younger than he really is. At the beginning of his career, the ‘gato’ has the advantage over boys in his same age range, increasing his chances of success in the arduous selection processes for professional clubs. At the end of his career, the age trick extends his stay on the pitch, delaying the time when clubs begin to see him as ‘old’ for the profession. Although it is impossible to count how many instances of ‘gatos’ there are in Brazilian football, there are indications that it is a rather common practice.


[43] Ironically, in a Brazilian sports paper, the same news that highlights Blatter’s declarations also states that the World Newspaper Association has accused FIFA of wanting to prohibit publication of photos from the World Cup on the Internet, because the organization presided over by Blatter was going to sell them to mobile-phone operators (Lance!, 13 October 2005).


[45] On the date that this essay was completed, 11 December 2005, the minimum monthly salary was 300 reais, and the Euro was quoted at R$2.64. Of the 14,678 professional players whose contracts were registered with the CBF in December of 2004, 8,930 earned up to one minimum monthly salary, 3,883 earned between 1 and 2 minimum monthly salaries, 4,311 earned between 2 and 5 minimum monthly salaries, 414 between 5 and 10 minimum monthly salaries, 393 between 10 and 20 minimum monthly salaries, and 631 earned more than 20 minimum monthly salaries. (Globo Revista, no.19, 5 December 2004).

[46] Damo, Do Dom à Profissão, 199ff.


[48] The club structure of Brazilian football is highly concentrated; the 20 largest clubs have 92.5 per cent of the fans, according to a study conducted by the magazine Placar in 2004 (cited by Damo, Do Dom à Profissão, 75).

[49] Caldas, O pontapé inicial (Kickoff. Memory of Brazilian Football (1894–1933)).

[50] Damo, Do Dom à Profissão, 85.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Six fans were killed during the Brazilian Championship in 2005. Five were killed by other fans and one was killed by the police when he ran away from a hooligan fight. These confrontations always took place outside of the stadium, two nearby and another four in underground or bus stations. A few times these confrontations were set up on the Internet. A pioneering
study project by the ‘Permanent Centre for the Study of the Sociology of Football at UERJ’, directed by Professor Mauricio Murad, gathered the following data: 80 per cent of fans from organized clubs are between 14 and 25, and over 50 per cent are minors. In addition to the organized clubs (or ‘uniformed’ clubs, as they are referred to in São Paulo) being just a small number of fans, only a minority (roughly 5 per cent) of these fans are ‘violent, fighters or rabble-rousers’. See Mauricio Murad, ‘Futebol e violência no Brasil’, 101.

We have seen an increase in good quality literature on the organized fan clubs. In addition to the text by Murad, already cited, we would also recommend at least two other titles: Toledo, Torcidas organizadas de futebol; Teixeira, Os perigos da paixão: visitando jovens torcidas cariocas.

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