

# The Push-Pull Dynamics in Football Labour Migration and Football Trafficking.

## Overview

The article will discuss the various push-pull factors that contribute in the decision making of African football playing minors to be trafficked or to migrate (regular or irregular) to Europe based on the state of African football and the personal aspirations and circumstances of the players. The article is divided into four parts; the definitions of the key terms that will guide the discussion; an introduction detailing the need to highlight the various factors involved; the push-pull dynamics in the trafficking and migration of African youths in general, and then more specifically in African football; conclusion.

## 1 Definitions

To understand the existence of the push-pull dynamics and the factors therein we must first identify what is meant by Migration (regular, irregular and labour) and the term “football trafficking”.

### 1.1 Migration

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) provides definitions for a range of key terms to be used within this article. The IOM explains that migration can be defined as “the movement of a person or a group of persons ... across an international border”.<sup>1</sup> When this occurs through legal routes it can be referred to as “regular” migration.

The IOM admits that there is no universally accepted definition for “irregular” migration but goes on to explain that this occurs when there is a movement of persons which takes place outside the regulatory norms of the sending, transit and receiving countries.<sup>2</sup> Whereas, labour

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<sup>1</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on Migration* (International Migration Law N°25, 2nd edn International Organization for Migration, Switzerland 2011). p. 62

<sup>2</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on Migration* (International Migration Law N°25, 2nd edn International Organization for Migration, Switzerland 2011). p. 54

migration is defined as the movement of persons for employment and is deemed by most countries as a legal (and therefore “regular”) means of migrating in their migration laws.<sup>3</sup>

## 1.2 Football Trafficking

Football trafficking is often divided into two parts, human trafficking which takes place *in* football and human trafficking that takes place *through* football.

On the one hand, human trafficking *in* football occurs when an intermediary<sup>4</sup> takes advantage of their position with the football playing minors. This often occurs when the intermediary, after having received a sum of money to procure a contract or trial with a club for a player, provides a contract of an exploitative nature that would ultimately be to the detriment of the football minor, often occurring across borders and in a different country.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, human trafficking *through* football transpires in an indirect but nevertheless more prevalent manner, as the evidence from the vast majority of human trafficking cases reveal.<sup>6</sup> Human trafficking *through* football occurs when the promise made by an intermediary of the existence of an interested foreign football team is a charade, and on arrival in the destination country, the intermediary abandons the player having appropriated his fees from the player and his family prior to the journey.<sup>7</sup> The unscrupulous persons involved here are essentially smugglers who give false promises to young players and their families to convince them to pay large sums of money for expatriation, only to then leave these minors to their own devices on arrival in the foreign country.<sup>8</sup>

Note that both phenomenon are conflated within the term football trafficking.

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<sup>3</sup> International Organization for Migration, *Glossary on Migration* (International Migration Law N°25, 2nd edn International Organization for Migration, Switzerland 2011). p. 54

<sup>4</sup> FIFA, “REGULATIONS on Working with Intermediaries” (2015) p. 4. Defines intermediaries as “A natural or legal person who, for a fee or free of charge, represents players and/or clubs in negotiations with a view to concluding an employment contract or represents clubs in negotiations with a view to concluding a transfer agreement.”

<sup>5</sup> Esson, James, 'Better off at home? Rethinking responses to trafficked West African footballers in Europe' (2015) 41(3) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 512, p. 516

<sup>6</sup> Poli, Raffaele, “The migrations of African football players to Europe: human trafficking and neo-colonialism in question” (2010) *Football for Development*, Vienna, Austria.  
< [http://www.footballfordevelopment.net/uploads/tx\\_drblob/storage/Poli\\_migration-of-African-football-players\\_01.pdf](http://www.footballfordevelopment.net/uploads/tx_drblob/storage/Poli_migration-of-African-football-players_01.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Esson, James, 'Better off at home? Rethinking responses to trafficked West African footballers in Europe' (2015) 41(3) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 512, p. 516

<sup>8</sup> Poli, Raffaele, 'The migrations of African football players to Europe: human trafficking and neo-colonialism in question' (2010) *Football for Development*, Vienna, Austria.  
< [http://www.footballfordevelopment.net/uploads/tx\\_drblob/storage/Poli\\_migration-of-African-football-players\\_01.pdf](http://www.footballfordevelopment.net/uploads/tx_drblob/storage/Poli_migration-of-African-football-players_01.pdf)

## 2 Introduction

The prevalent view and policies concerning the occurrence of football trafficking have often targeted the individuals who fall victim to this crime. The victims, through restrictive regulations, are encouraged to shy away from situations which may result in irregular migration and are essentially told they would be better off staying in their home countries rather than falling prey to unscrupulous intermediaries looking to transport them abroad and exploit them.<sup>9</sup> However, what the policies and regulations fail to consider is that for most of the individuals who are trafficked or smuggled abroad, their home country (and Africa as a whole) is the exact place the individuals do not want to be.<sup>10</sup>

Research on young people in sub-Saharan Africa has showed a “migratory disposition” from the young Africans as they believed that their life chances and their socio-economic circumstances would not improve if they chose to remain in Africa. In addition, the young people felt that there would likely be no significant change in their predicament in the nearest future if they chose to stay on the continent and saw migration (both regular and irregular) as their only way of getting a better life.<sup>11</sup>

This migratory disposition can also be linked with the sourcing strategies of the powerful buyers and football teams abroad,<sup>12</sup> in collaboration with the *male fide* intermediaries who implant the ideas of a better life outside Africa, as they lure football minors with tales of boundless riches and opportunities for them and their families should they agree to be transported to the foreign team. It is contended that this has occurred in part due to the commodification of African youths through the migratory process, as human trafficking and smuggling are now seemingly viewed as business ventures by bad intentioned intermediaries<sup>13</sup> looking to take advantage of the child in the foreign country and to possibly benefit from any profit yielded from the onward sale of the player.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Esson, James, 'Better off at home? Rethinking responses to trafficked West African footballers in Europe' (2015) 41(3) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 512, p. 512

<sup>10</sup> Esson, James, 'Better off at home? Rethinking responses to trafficked West African footballers in Europe' (2015) 41(3) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 512, p. 512

<sup>11</sup> J. Esson, “Escape to victory: Development, youth entrepreneurship and the migration of Ghanaian footballers”, (2015) *Geoforum* 64, pp. 47-55, p. 48

<sup>12</sup> McGrath, Siobhán and Fabiola Mieres, 'Addressing the demand side in and through supply chains: Mapping the field of initiatives around human trafficking, forced labour and slavery.' (2017) DemandAT Working Paper No 8. p 12

<sup>13</sup> Ellis, Tom and James Akpala, 'Making sense of the relationship between trafficking in persons, human smuggling, and organised crime: the case of Nigeria' (2011) 84(1) *The Police Journal* 13. p 5

<sup>14</sup> J. Esson, “Modern slavery, child trafficking, and the rise of West African football academies” (*Open Democracy*, 15 January 2015)

There are also several other contributory elements that demonstrate the migratory disposition that is seen amongst the African youths, these factors are often aligned with the increased likelihood of the minors being open to migration and their possible exploitation. Some of the factors are prevalent in the home country of the migrants and are said to affect the mentality of the African youths, these include informal and unregulated labour markets at home; the absence of information on being able to enforce statutorily provided labour rights in a working environment;<sup>15</sup> and the high demand for cheap and foreign labour which exists abroad.<sup>16</sup>

Generally, instances of migration and football trafficking require the existence of an intermediary or facilitator willing to provide the youths with legal or illegal services to make the trip abroad possible.<sup>17</sup> In addition, there is arguably no other sport with the number of certified intermediaries than there are in football, however, it is argued that the fact the intermediaries are certified by their respective governing bodies does not diminish any predetermined bad intentions they might have had regarding the exploitation of African youths. It is further posited that the relative ease with which these intermediaries are believed to control and manipulate the vulnerable African youths who are put in their care is another factor which leads to their possible exploitation.<sup>18</sup>

Bowman mentioned the existence of a 'neo-classical theory' which also plays a part in the migration of African football minors, as he explained that "[the market often] operates through a supply and demand nexus fuelled by unbalance between the labour forces in different countries."<sup>19</sup> Bowman provided an example as he stated that when a country has plentiful labour force but relatively lower wages, the labour force will inevitably migrate to a

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<<https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/jamesesson/modernslaverychildtraffickingandriseofwestafricanfootballacademi>> accessed on 1 June 2016

<sup>15</sup> Falconer, Claire and Caroline Robinson, 'Trafficking for labour exploitation - Introduction to Migration series, Guidance booklet #9' (2015)(Migration Yorkshire: Leeds). p 8

<sup>16</sup> Ellis, Tom and James Akpala, 'Making sense of the relationship between trafficking in persons, human smuggling, and organised crime: the case of Nigeria' (2011) 84(1) *The Police Journal* 13. p 5

<sup>17</sup> Ellis, Tom and James Akpala, 'Making sense of the relationship between trafficking in persons, human smuggling, and organised crime: the case of Nigeria' (2011) 84(1) *The Police Journal* 13. p 4

<sup>18</sup> Ellis, Tom and James Akpala, 'Making sense of the relationship between trafficking in persons, human smuggling, and organised crime: the case of Nigeria' (2011) 84(1) *The Police Journal* 13. p 6

<sup>19</sup> B. Bowman, "Is international football migration simply another type of labour migration?" (*EU50605 – The Politics of Migration*, 6 May 2011)

<[http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011\\_internationalfootballmigration.pdf](http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011_internationalfootballmigration.pdf)> accessed on 1 June 2016. p 2

country where labour is scarce and in greater demand, as the players make a rational choice to get higher wages.<sup>20</sup>

Thusly, the neo-classical theory is strongly linked with the push-pull dynamics to be discussed in this article, as the various factors pushing the African football youths to leave Africa are placed in comparison with the pulling factors of the intended destination countries, making the decision of wanting to leave the African continent one that the African youths believe is linked to the possibility of improving their socio-economic circumstances and having a better standard of living.

### 3 Push-Pull Dynamics

The IOM succinctly described push-pull dynamics as “an analysis of migration [regular and irregular] which takes into consideration the push factors which drive people to leave their country (such as economic, social, or political problems) against the pull factors attracting them to the country of destination.”<sup>21</sup>

Scholars, Castles and Miller, expanded on this as they claimed that the push-pull dynamics often come into play when an individual is looking to make a choice on whether or not to migrate based on factors pushing them out of the sending country (lack of economic opportunities) and the pulling factors in the receiving country (higher demand for labour and better social opportunities).<sup>22</sup>

It is asserted that the push-pull dynamics should often be considered in alignment with other socio-economic and political factors that may affect the migration of African youths in a given country,<sup>23</sup> as well as other determining circumstances that make an individual go

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<sup>20</sup> B. Bowman, “Is international football migration simply another type of labour migration?” (*EU50605 – The Politics of Migration*, 6 May 2011) <[http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011\\_internationalfootballmigration.pdf](http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011_internationalfootballmigration.pdf)> accessed on 1 June 2016. p 2

<sup>21</sup> International Organization for Migration. 'Key Migration Terms' <<https://www.iom.int/key-migration-terms>> accessed on 25/07/2018.

<sup>22</sup> S. Castles and M. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998), p. 20. Cited in Bowman, Benjamin. 'Is international football migration simply another type of labour migration?: The politics of migration through the lens of international football migration from Africa to Europe' <[http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011\\_internationalfootballmigration.pdf](http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011_internationalfootballmigration.pdf)> accessed on 09/11/2017, p. 2

<sup>23</sup> Bowman, Benjamin. 'Is international football migration simply another type of labour migration?: The politics of migration through the lens of international football migration from Africa to Europe' <[http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011\\_internationalfootballmigration.pdf](http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011_internationalfootballmigration.pdf)> accessed on 09/11/2017. p. 4

against the natural human tendency of persevering in one's comfort zone.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, there seems to be a plethora of circumstances that lead players to migrate and situations that make the African youths vulnerable and open to being trafficked and exploited.

### 3.1 Push Factors

The push factors can be divided into general factors faced by most African youths looking to find opportunities in order to hopefully change their socio-economic situation, and football specific factors that push the players from plying their trade on the African continent.

#### 3.1.1 General Factors

Youth unemployment is a global issue and one that pushes young people to migrate to find work when there is a shortage of opportunities available in their home country or if they lack the requisite skills needed to do the work that is available.<sup>25</sup> With the absence of jobs resulting in the subsequent lack of income and ultimately poverty, it is argued that poverty is one of a range of "risk factors" that makes youths vulnerable to the ploys of human traffickers and smugglers looking to engage the youths in irregular migration to exploit them.<sup>26</sup>

Along with the absence of job opportunities and the high rate of unemployment and poverty, there are also instances of age and gender discrimination that take place across Africa, making the circumstances more difficult for the African youths to make a way for themselves in that environment.<sup>27</sup> In addition, there are reports of unequal access to education in Africa, which limits the access to skilled occupations as well as a general lack of awareness of the possible risks involved in irregular migration.<sup>28</sup>

The International Labour Office (ILO) in their resource kit for policy-makers and practitioners made mention of additional factors that could potentially make the African

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<sup>24</sup> Bowman, Benjamin. 'Is international football migration simply another type of labour migration?: The politics of migration through the lens of international football migration from Africa to Europe' <[http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011\\_internationalfootballmigration.pdf](http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011_internationalfootballmigration.pdf)> accessed on 09/11/2017, p. 3

<sup>25</sup> IPEC, *Combating trafficking in children for labour exploitation: A resource kit for policy-makers and practitioners* (International Labour Office; ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, Geneva 2008). Book 1: Understanding What Child Trafficking Is, pg. 8

<sup>26</sup> IPEC, *Combating trafficking in children for labour exploitation: A resource kit for policy-makers and practitioners* (International Labour Office; ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, Geneva 2008). Book 1: Understanding What Child Trafficking Is, pg. 20

<sup>27</sup> Ellis, Tom and James Akpala, 'Making sense of the relationship between trafficking in persons, human smuggling, and organised crime: the case of Nigeria' (2011) 84(1) *The Police Journal* 13. pg. 5

<sup>28</sup> Ellis, Tom and James Akpala, 'Making sense of the relationship between trafficking in persons, human smuggling, and organised crime: the case of Nigeria' (2011) 84(1) *The Police Journal* 13. pg. 5

youths vulnerable to being trafficked or smuggled, they described this as being “poverty plus” factors whereby poverty – i.e. the lack of income – alone does not lead to the vulnerability of the African youths on its own, but when illness is combined with poverty for instance, this then leads to the increased vulnerability and the consequent propensity to be trafficked.<sup>29</sup> Other examples of poverty plus mentioned by the ILO include natural (drought or floods) or man-made disasters (conflicts), economic shocks and family centred crisis (divorce, death etc.).<sup>30</sup>

Proximity to a border where the neighbouring country has a thriving labour market is another factor which may lead to irregular migration.<sup>31</sup> This is an instance which could also be seen within the football specific push factors for migration, as the example of West African minors travelling to Ghana to enrol in the densely situated accredited football academies there is pertinent.<sup>32</sup> This migration somewhat resulted in the term “exploitation within exploitation” being coined and used to explain how the players who migrated from other African countries were asked to pay sums of money to procure themselves Ghanaian passports in a bid to put them in the best position to enter the academies.<sup>33</sup>

It is worth noting that some of the aforementioned factors lie outside the purview of the law enforcement and the criminal justice system of a source country (such as poverty and youth unemployment) whereas other factors (such as corruption, gender and age discrimination) could be tackled by the justice system to improve some of the economic circumstances and job opportunities for the African youths, and in so doing perhaps persuade them to not embark on the risk of irregular migration.<sup>34</sup>

When the various push factors discussed are considered collectively by the African youths – and coupled with the increased border controls and stringent visa requirements<sup>35</sup> – it often

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<sup>29</sup> IPEC, *Combating trafficking in children for labour exploitation: A resource kit for policy-makers and practitioners* (International Labour Office; ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, Geneva 2008). Book 1: Understanding What Child Trafficking Is, pg. 21

<sup>30</sup> IPEC, *Combating trafficking in children for labour exploitation: A resource kit for policy-makers and practitioners* (International Labour Office; ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, Geneva 2008). Book 1: Understanding What Child Trafficking Is, pg. 22

<sup>31</sup> IPEC, *Combating trafficking in children for labour exploitation: A resource kit for policy-makers and practitioners* (International Labour Office; ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour, Geneva 2008). Book 4: Taking Action Against Child Trafficking, pg. 10

<sup>32</sup> D. McDougall, “The scandal of Africa’s trafficked players” (*The Guardian*, 6 January 2008)

<sup>33</sup> D. McDougall, “The scandal of Africa’s trafficked players” (*The Guardian*, 6 January 2008)

<sup>34</sup> Ellis, Tom and James Akpala, 'Making sense of the relationship between trafficking in persons, human smuggling, and organised crime: the case of Nigeria' (2011) 84(1) *The Police Journal* 13. pg. 10

<sup>35</sup> Ellis, Tom and James Akpala, 'Making sense of the relationship between trafficking in persons, human smuggling, and organised crime: the case of Nigeria' (2011) 84(1) *The Police Journal* 13. pg. 5

leads to the triggering of the trafficking or irregular migration process, as the youths seek the help of traffickers and smugglers to facilitate their trips abroad. It is argued that the African youths deem irregular migration as a worthwhile risk to take due to the limited options to legitimately migrate to European countries to improve their socio-economic circumstances and standard of living.<sup>36</sup>

### 3.1.2 Football Specific Factors

With the already discussed circumstances and factors that push the African youths to want to leave the continent, the hope of bettering one's life chances is not one that is synonymous with only aspiring football players but rather represents a trend across the continent.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, professional football outside of Africa is often viewed as a vehicle which can be used to elevate and change the life of an individual and his family.<sup>38</sup>

Some football specific push factors have already been discussed under the umbrella of the general factors, but their further inclusion here is evidence as to how extensive the effect such factors have on the lives of the African youths. These factors therefore include the fragile political economy and political instability, the high levels of poverty which leads to an uncertain football landscape within the continent,<sup>39</sup> the substandard administration of African leagues, the engrained corrupt practices, limited state investment in the leagues and the unnecessary governmental interference in matters concerning national FAs.<sup>40</sup>

Darby posits that the high levels of poverty, limited economic opportunities and the weak football infrastructure makes playing football in Africa a less appealing option as there is often little in the way of financial reward and stability for the players.<sup>41</sup> Esson makes mention of some of the occurrences that contribute to this unstable footballing climate in Africa, which included animals encroaching on the pitch and destroying scoring opportunities, pitches being double booked, a shortage of match officials and travelling hours for an away

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<sup>36</sup> J. Esson, "Better Off at Home? Rethinking Responses to Trafficked West African Footballers in Europe", (2015) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41:3, 512-530, p. 527

<sup>37</sup> Esson, James, 'You have to try your luck: male Ghanaian youth and the uncertainty of football migration' (2015) 47(6) *Environ Plann A* 1383, p. 1386

<sup>38</sup> J. Esson, "Better Off at Home? Rethinking Responses to Trafficked West African Footballers in Europe", (2015) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41:3, 512-530, pg. 521

<sup>39</sup> Esson, James, 'You have to try your luck: male Ghanaian youth and the uncertainty of football migration' (2015) 47(6) *Environ Plann A* 1383, p. 1387

<sup>40</sup> Darby, Paul, 'African football labour migration to Portugal: colonial and neo-colonial resource' (2007) 8(4) *Soccer & Society* 495. p. 499

<sup>41</sup> Paul Darby, "African Football Labour Migration to Portugal: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Resource", (2007) *Soccer & Society*, 8:4, 495-509, pg. 500

fixture without knowing who the opponent was going to be.<sup>42</sup> All these factors come together to act as a “push” and a compelling motivational reason for the talented players to want to seek better opportunities of playing professional football outside the African continent.<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless, it is one thing to seek the opportunities abroad and another thing to be able to travel, as the main difficulty for a number of these youths lies in securing safe passage to the foreign country. Majority of the youths who solicit the use of facilitators and middle men to make the trip abroad, are often poorer individuals who would not ordinarily qualify for tourist or student visas.<sup>44</sup> This has in part come about because of the tightening of EU and US borders<sup>45</sup> along with the more general “closure of the west” and the adoption of stricter immigration policies across the board.<sup>46</sup> It is contended that this has had the adverse effect on the African youths, as the increased requirements for making the trip legally have served to further reinforce and fetishize the idea and appeal of migrating to regions such as Europe and North America by any means necessary.<sup>47</sup>

The increased immigration policy demands have also created a perception amongst African youths where they believe that it is nearly impossible to acquire a visa and make the trip abroad through legal channels.<sup>48</sup> The situation has consequently fostered a climate where *male fide* intermediaries can thrive, as they capitalise on the eagerness of the African youths seeking to migrate for better economic opportunities.<sup>49</sup>

With the difficulties encountered in securing a move abroad through official channels, the African football youths still undecided about going to the extreme lengths to leave Africa (and African football) are left to deal with a deficient football infrastructure and an unstable

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<sup>42</sup> J. Esson, “You have to try your luck: male Ghanaian youth and the uncertainty of football migration” (2015) *Environment and Planning*, Volume 47, pages 1383-1397, pg. 1387

<sup>43</sup> P. Darby, “‘Go Outside’: The History, Economics and Geography of Ghanaian Football Labour Migration” (2010) *African Historical Review*, 42:1, 19-41, pg. 36

<sup>44</sup> Ellis, Tom and James Akpala, 'Making sense of the relationship between trafficking in persons, human smuggling, and organised crime: the case of Nigeria' (2011) 84(1) *The Police Journal* 13, pg. 4

<sup>45</sup> J. Esson, “You have to try your luck: male Ghanaian youth and the uncertainty of football migration” (2015) *Environment and Planning*, Volume 47, pages 1383-1397, pg. 1391

<sup>46</sup> J. Esson, “Escape to victory: Development, youth entrepreneurship and the migration of Ghanaian footballers”, (2015) *Geoforum* 64, pp. 47-55, pg. 53

<sup>47</sup> J. Esson, “Escape to victory: Development, youth entrepreneurship and the migration of Ghanaian footballers”, (2015) *Geoforum* 64, pp. 47-55, pg. 51

<sup>48</sup> J. Esson, “Escape to victory: Development, youth entrepreneurship and the migration of Ghanaian footballers”, (2015) *Geoforum* 64, pp. 47-55, pg. 50

<sup>49</sup> J. Esson, “Escape to victory: Development, youth entrepreneurship and the migration of Ghanaian footballers”, (2015) *Geoforum* 64, pp. 47-55, pg. 54

climate regarding football governance on the continent.<sup>50</sup> In addition, this uncertainty and confusion affects the running of the FAs, and when coupled with the impact of corruption in African football it only serves to further the resolve of the players looking to leave the continent for pastures new, and also makes it easier for the European clubs to utilise their superior sourcing and buying power as they cherry-pick the best young African talent.<sup>51</sup>

Corruption in African football is a matter that Poli asserts is similar to the description of “internal neo-colonialism”<sup>52</sup> as the funds received by FAs, which is often meant for the development of the local game, are regularly misappropriated<sup>53</sup> with some statistics even showing that 90 out of every 100 dollars meant for the development of grassroots football in Africa “disappears” into the pockets of private individuals.<sup>54</sup> Nonetheless, this assertion will come as no surprise to the majority, as the state of the football facilities in some African teams is often of poor quality and is not properly maintained.<sup>55</sup> Some have gone on to argue that the issue with corruption is not one that is synonymous with the African continent alone but rather stems from the top of the FIFA pyramid,<sup>56</sup> however it is the scale in which corruption occurs in Africa that is considered to be the most worrying and contributory push factor for the African youths.<sup>57</sup>

FIFA’s rules on non-interference also hinders the governments of the African countries from combating corruption within their respective Football Associations (FAs),<sup>58</sup> as the FIFA rules serve as protection for the perpetrators of the corrupt crimes within the various FAs.<sup>59</sup> It is held that the FIFA’s rules shield the FAs from being the target of any democratic process, as

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<sup>50</sup> P. Darby, “Moving players, traversing perspectives: Global value chains, production networks and Ghanaian football labour migration”, (2013) *Geoforum* 50, 43-53, pg. 48

<sup>51</sup> D. McDougall, “The scandal of Africa’s trafficked players” (*The Guardian*, 6 January 2008)

<sup>52</sup> R. Poli, “The migrations of African football players to Europe: Human trafficking and neo-colonialism in question”, (2010) presented at the Football for Development Conference, Vienna, Austria

<sup>53</sup> M. Chiweshe, “The Problem with African Football: Corruption and the (Under) Development of the Game on the Continent” (2014) *African Sports Law and Business Bulletin* 2, p. 2

<sup>54</sup> B. Oliver, “Making a killing out of football: African reporters investigate” (*The Guardian*, 24 October 2010). Cited in M. Chiweshe, “The Problem with African Football: Corruption and the (Under) Development of the Game on the Continent” (2014) *African Sports Law and Business Bulletin* 2, p. 3

<sup>55</sup> M. Chiweshe, “The Problem with African Football: Corruption and the (Under) Development of the Game on the Continent” (2014) *African Sports Law and Business Bulletin* 2, p. 3

<sup>56</sup> T. Khumalo, “Football’s rotten core must be excised” (*News 24*, 7 April 2013). Cited M. Chiweshe, “The Problem with African Football: Corruption and the (Under) Development of the Game on the Continent” (2014) *African Sports Law and Business Bulletin* 2, p. 2

<sup>57</sup> M. Chiweshe, “The Problem with African Football: Corruption and the (Under) Development of the Game on the Continent” (2014) *African Sports Law and Business Bulletin* 2, p. 3

<sup>58</sup> FIFA, “Regulations Governing the Application of the Statutes Standing Orders of the Congress” (April 2015 edition) Section 68(2)

<sup>59</sup> M. Chiweshe, “The Problem with African Football: Corruption and the (Under) Development of the Game on the Continent” (2014) *African Sports Law and Business Bulletin* 2, p. 1

any inference or attempt at overhauling officials at an FA by a government – even if it were to be conducted with the good intention of wanting to impute good governance – will be viewed as an intrusion by FIFA and will most likely result in a suspension for the country whose government interfered in the footballing matters of the FA.<sup>60</sup>

### 3.2 Pull factors

With the extent of corruption in African football and the weak infrastructure, it is unsurprising that there are only a few number of teams on the continent that have the professional infrastructure and the financial resources to pay players the kind of salaries that could possibly encourage them to remain and play their professional football on the African continent.<sup>61</sup> Darby mentioned these few teams as the “primary player exporting zones” that exist within the continent which have a pulling ability similar to that of the European teams, as he mentioned only Al Ahly and Arab Contractors in Egypt and Esperance in Tunisia.<sup>62</sup>

This limited list of possible destinations for the African youths to ply their trade within the continent is in stark contrast with the numerous destinations that exist in Europe, with teams willing to give the players the opportunities they crave in addition to other economic incentives. This inequality between the pulling powers of European leagues compared with their African counterparts is due to the economic disparities between the leagues, as this has inevitably fostered the migration of African football players to the wealthy European clubs.<sup>63</sup>

On the one hand, the disparity is furthered by the large revenues generated by the European clubs through the UEFA Champions League and the sale of media rights by the various European leagues. The African teams on the other hand, do not have such structures in place to monetise their leagues and produce the kind of revenues needed to keep hold of their best players when approached by the European teams, as the European clubs are able to offer the type of salaries that do not exist anywhere else in football, let alone in African football.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> M. Chiweshe, “The Problem with African Football: Corruption and the (Under) Development of the Game on the Continent” (2014) *African Sports Law and Business Bulletin* 2, p. 4

<sup>61</sup> Paul Darby, “African Football Labour Migration to Portugal: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Resource”, (2007) *Soccer & Society*, 8:4, 495-509, pg. 499-500

<sup>62</sup> Paul Darby, “African Football Labour Migration to Portugal: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Resource”, (2007) *Soccer & Society*, 8:4, 495-509, pg. 499-500

<sup>63</sup> Bowman, Benjamin. 'Is international football migration simply another type of labour migration?: The politics of migration through the lens of international football migration from Africa to Europe' <[http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011\\_internationalfootballmigration.pdf](http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011_internationalfootballmigration.pdf)> accessed on 09/11/2017. p. 2

<sup>64</sup> Paul Darby, “African Football Labour Migration to Portugal: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Resource”, (2007) *Soccer & Society*, 8:4, 495-509, pg. 499-500

Furthermore, with the globalization of the transfer market that has occurred in football ever since the ruling in the *Bosman* case, the recruitment strategies of the top European clubs have often revolved around locating the most talented youth players abroad and “pulling” said players to Europe with various economic incentives to sway the player.<sup>65</sup>

This recruitment method is one that has been criticised by some, as it has been argued that using economic incentives to pull players to Europe is akin to the economic imperialism which existed in colonial times, and forms part of what can be considered to be neo-colonial exploitation between developed and developing countries in the post-colonial era.<sup>66</sup>

Additionally, regarding the issue of colonial ties, some African players consider that the ease of migrating to a country with a shared colonial history may prove to be a pull factor in itself, as there would be fewer linguistic challenges or cultural barriers for the player to adapt to whilst also benefitting from the greater economic opportunities that are available in Europe.<sup>67</sup>

The African youths are often made aware of the increased economic opportunities and the consumer culture that exists beyond the borders of their countries through the broadcasting media outlets available at home, along with the often extravagant lifestyles of the returning football migrants, this serves to reinforce the appeal of going abroad in order to obtain wealth and socio-economic betterment.<sup>68</sup> It is common knowledge within football that the best players from all over the world follow the money as they chase better paying opportunities, why then should African youths be any different? As expecting the players to sacrifice potentially lucrative careers in professional football would be unreasonable and irrational,<sup>69</sup> especially when considering that the player would have the opportunity to improve he and his family’s standard of living through the added financial resources received by playing in Europe.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Bowman, Benjamin. 'Is international football migration simply another type of labour migration?: The politics of migration through the lens of international football migration from Africa to Europe' <[http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011\\_internationalfootballmigration.pdf](http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011_internationalfootballmigration.pdf)> accessed on 09/11/2017. p. 4

<sup>66</sup> Paul Darby, “African Football Labour Migration to Portugal: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Resource”, (2007) *Soccer & Society*, 8:4, 495-509, pg. 501

<sup>67</sup> Paul Darby, “African Football Labour Migration to Portugal: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Resource”, (2007) *Soccer & Society*, 8:4, 495-509, pg. 499

<sup>68</sup> J. Esson, “Escape to victory: Development, youth entrepreneurship and the migration of Ghanaian footballers”, (2015) *Geoforum* 64, pp. 47-55, pg. 50

<sup>69</sup> Paul Darby, “African Football Labour Migration to Portugal: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Resource”, (2007) *Soccer & Society*, 8:4, 495-509, pg. 500

<sup>70</sup> A. Guest, “Hope, Fear, and Youth Academies: African Players and the Changing Demographics of European Soccer” (*Pitch Invasion*, 7 September 2009)

## 4 Conclusion

When we consider the various push-pull dynamics discussed in this article and factor in the weak football infrastructure and the limited economic opportunities available in the African game, it is hard to be critical of the African youths seeking better opportunities to achieve their ambitions abroad.<sup>71</sup>

However, the issue with the continued migration of the best African football talent to European leagues is that it wholly undermines the quality of football on the continent, and though restrictions on the transfer of players will preserve talent, it may not result in the improvement of performances on the pitch,<sup>72</sup> as the better equipment and coaches abroad often serve to improve the players ability at a scale that cannot yet be replicated in African football. Other positives of football labour migration include how the globalization of football has allowed skilled migrants to seek high wages and living standards that may currently be unavailable in their respective countries, even if they do not end up as superstars and household names in European football.<sup>73</sup>

Nevertheless, the problem arises when some of the players who are unable to get professional contracts having migrated, refuse to return to Africa, as they believe they have a better chance of being successful residing in Europe illegally and without any legitimate means of sustenance.<sup>74</sup>

Better footballing structures should therefore be fostered in Africa to make playing on the continent a more appealing option, as improved facilities and economic opportunities being made available at “home” will serve to provide more choices for the players and allows them to decide to travel abroad based on preference as opposed to viewing migration as a necessity and the only means in which one can achieve his goals within professional football.

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<<http://pitchinvasion.net/hopefearandyouthacademiesafricanplayersandthechangingdemographicsofeuropeansoccer/>> accessed 1 June 2016

<sup>71</sup> Paul Darby, “African Football Labour Migration to Portugal: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Resource”, (2007) *Soccer & Society*, 8:4, 495-509, pg. 501

<sup>72</sup> Paul Darby, “African Football Labour Migration to Portugal: Colonial and Neo-Colonial Resource”, (2007) *Soccer & Society*, 8:4, 495-509, pg. 500

<sup>73</sup> Bowman, Benjamin. 'Is international football migration simply another type of labour migration?: The politics of migration through the lens of international football migration from Africa to Europe' <[http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011\\_internationalfootballmigration.pdf](http://people.bath.ac.uk/bd203/docs/Bowman2011_internationalfootballmigration.pdf)> accessed on 09/11/2017. p. 9

<sup>74</sup> Esson, James, 'Better off at home? Rethinking responses to trafficked West African footballers in Europe' (2015) 41(3) *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 512. p. 512

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