Africa: SDP and Sports Academies

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Introduction

Within mainstream migration studies, there is a voluminous literature on migration-development interactions and outcomes (cf. De Haas, 2010). As this Handbook reveals, there is also a significant and growing body of research on the relationships between sport and development. Falling between these two canons of academic work is a smaller literature which has explored the intersections between sports migration and development in the global South (Bale, 2004; Darby, 2000; Esson, 2015a; Klein, 2014). Much of this work has focused on football migration from the African continent, particularly West Africa, and has acknowledged that football academies, defined as facilities or coaching programs designed to produce talent predominantly for export, are pivotal in this process (Darby, Akindes and Kirwin, 2007).

Recent scholarship has shown how aspirations to migrate and the academies that seek to facilitate this articulate with varying forms of social and economic development in complex ways, and produce more heterogeneous outcomes than were previously observed (Darby, 2013a; Dubinsky and Schler, 2017). This chapter explores these articulations in relation to football in Africa, predominantly Ghana where academies have become increasingly visible. While African football is the focus of this chapter, this discussion speaks to wider debates on the migration-development nexus in the context of sport, namely the tension between sport development, the commodification of sporting talent, and aspirations to develop an individual through sport and thereby enact wider social development.

We begin by positioning the academic, media and policy discourses concerning football academies within wider polemicizing on the migration-development nexus.

After briefly accounting for the typologies of football academies in Africa, we then concentrate on Ghana, a context where all three authors have undertaken considerable ethnographic field research examining various aspects of what has become a culture of football migration. The chapter examines the relationship between migration, football academies and development via the following four themes: the shifting role of academies in relation to national development agendas; academies as vehicles for development; their contribution to local and national sport development; and the role of family in decision-making around the pursuit of transnational mobility through football. We conclude by outlining two key areas for future research that will extend debates over football academies vis-à-vis the migration (in sport)-development nexus.

The migration-development nexus and sports academies in the Global South

The inclusion of a migration-specific and several migration-related targets in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, published in 2015, has firmly entrenched migration in the mainstream development agenda. However, conceiving of migration and migrants as levers or engines of development is not new. The emigration of both the highly skilled and unskilled from the global South to the North and the impact of this process on development in sending countries has long vexed politicians, economists, policy-makers and academics alike. In the second half of the twentieth century, conflicting intellectual paradigms rooted in neo-classical and neo-Marxist perspectives vied for primacy in the migration research and policy communities. Migration was painted as a zero-sum game involving either gains or drains, winners or losers, a cause for optimism or pessimism. Optimists argued that

capital could be accrued by donor nations through remittances, the (assumed) return of migrants and associated brain circulation, rising wages and transnationally-minded diasporas, all of which could drive development. Pessimists on the other hand, depicted skilled migration as an extractive process characterized by the haemorrhaging of valuable resources abroad, underdevelopment, a deepening of poverty and global inequality, and damaging socio-cultural impacts in sending societies (De Haas, 2010).

Similar fault-lines are observable when considering the relationship between development and the production (in academies) and migration of elite sportsmen and women from the global South. For example, Alan Klein's pioneering research on the presence of Major League Baseball academies in the Dominican Republic has illustrated that these facilities have not only contributed to the stagnation of Dominican baseball but has also promoted American cultural hegemony in the region (Klein, 1991). At the same time however, the Dominican response to this process and the subsequent development of the academy 'system' has seen local development gains being captured (Klein, 2009, 2014). Arbena (1994) has also noted the mixed impact of facilities or training programmes designed to facilitate sports migration in Latin America, particularly in football. Likewise, Bale and Sang's (1996) study of Kenyan running has shown that the growth of a system for producing elite Kenyan middle-distance runners has been characterised variously by processes of development and underdevelopment, exploitation, dependency and resistance.

The last two decades have witnessed an increasingly acrimonious debate on the consequences and developmental impact of the migration of African football players and the academies that have sprung up around the continent. This debate has

played out in the game's corridors of power, in media circles, between politicians and in both European and African courts. On one side are optimists who argue that the migration of African footballers provides the sort of exposure to elite leagues and salaries that not only contribute to the development of football in the continent, but that also allow individuals to become upwardly socially mobile. These micro-related impacts, it is argued, are broadened through the reinvestment of financial and intellectual capital back into the continent. Others vehemently disagree, painting the loss of Africa's football resources to Europe as evidence of uneven global development and neo-colonialism. This latter view was perhaps expressed most caustically by Sepp Blatter, the former president of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) who described those European clubs involved in the recruitment of African labour as "neo-colonialists" who "engage in social and economic rape by robbing the developing world of its best players" (*Financial Times*, 2003).

Issues of 'development' have also featured in academic scholarship on the mobilities of African players. Early research was strongly influenced by historical structuralist approaches that sought to expose how the uneven relations of power between actors in the global South and North respectively shaped African football more generally (see Darby, 2002), and the migration of players specifically (Bale, 2004; Darby, 2000). These macro-structural, neo-Marxist informed studies tended to produce analyses that often reduced African football players to commodities, bought and sold in international markets and controlled by European clubs and institutions (cf. Poli, 2006a). According to this perspective, opportunities for capturing developmental gains from transnational football migration in sending countries were limited. While arguably able to articulate general trends in world football, this

approach perpetuated a problematic understanding of African football institutions, African football players and their families as relatively powerless and passive actors within the football industry and concealed migration-development interactions at the micro- and meso-level.

As part of a broader shift in the sports migration literature that positions athletes as the central unit of analysis (Carter, 2013), recent research on the mobility of African players and the role of academies therein has accounted for the perspectives and experiences of actual and aspiring football migrants (Darby, 2013a; Engh and Agergaard, 2015; Esson, 2015b; Ungruhe and Büdel, 2016; Ungruhe and Esson, 2017), including those whose mobility can be described in terms of human trafficking (Esson, 2015c). There has also been recent work exploring the varying degrees of agency at play within football academies, particularly how both players and family members engaged in decision-making around entering and how players experienced residing in and exiting an academy as part of a broader process of athletic mobility (Van der Meij and Darby, 2017). This meso-level research locates individual players within larger aggregates, particularly the family but also peer groups, communities and a whole host of social institutions, and illustrates how these actors engage with the player and inform their understandings of how best to develop their careers (see also Ungruhe, 2017). Combined, this work shows that the pursuit of spatial mobility through football is closely linked to aspirations for social mobility, personal development and self-actualisation and the search for routes through which to meet intergenerational obligations towards family and the wider social environment (e.g. peers). Football academies have increasingly become pivotal in all of this and have come to function as sites where migration-development interactions and football intersect.

Football academies: insights from Africa

Football academies have come to secure a central place in Africa's export oriented football industry. As demand for highly skilled but cheap football labour in Europe has accelerated since the late 1990s, the presence of these facilities around the continent, but particularly in West Africa, has increased. Echoing the pessimistic perspective on migration-development interactions, academies have been implicated as part of an unseemly scramble for young, malleable athletes and have been variously described by senior African football administrators and journalists as "farms", "a terrible thing" and as sites where young players are "groomed" for export, leaving domestic leagues "bereft of talent" (Hayatou, 1999; Maradas, 2001). However, it is clear from our research in Ghana that academies are also considered by external and local actors not only as crucial in the production and export of talented footballers but as institutions that contribute to the development of football locally and that also impact, albeit modestly, on other development agendas (Darby, 2013a; Dubinsky and Schler 2017). Before detailing how these competing perspectives play out in Ghana (and neighbouring countries), it is important to add some additional context on African football academies.

African football academies vary in terms of approaches, infrastructure and type of ownership. Predominantly, while they share a common goal of producing African players for the European market and making profit, some foster additional educational aims and community development. Darby, Akindes, and Kirwin (2007) identified the following typology of African football academies, and it is possible to see how this typology maps onto trends in Ghana.

Type 1: Academies organized and run by professional African club sides or African national federations, which operate in a manner similar to those that exist in other parts of the world. In Ghana, a good example of this is the residential centre of excellence in Accra operated by the Ghanaian Football Association (GFA). Similarly, Liberty Professionals FC have gained renown in recent years for their success in producing young players for the professional game in Europe.

Type 2: Afro-European academies, which involve either a partnership between an existing academy and a European club, or an arrangement whereby a European club takes a controlling interest in an African club and then either subsumes the club's existing youth structures or establishes new ones. For example, in the late 1990's, Ajax Amsterdam invested €6 million in a 51% stake in the then Premier League Club, Obuasi Goldfields.

Type 3: Private, corporate-sponsored academies or charities, which have well established foundations and operate with the support and sponsorship of private individuals, usually former high-profile African players, national football federations, the corporate sector or on a charitable basis. The most notable example of the latter in Ghana is the Right to Dream Academy, a non-profit venture established in 1999 with internationally recognized facilities and educational and vocational training schemes.

Type 4: Improvised academies, which are set up on an ad hoc basis and involve unqualified staff and basic facilities. These academies provide a loosely structured football education and are typically not affiliated with the GFA.

Empirical evidence suggests that African football academies are more fluid than can be accounted for via a typology, and in nations renowned as exporters of football

talent each form of academy can be found (Ibid). Notably, the form and function of football academies change over time and in line with developments taking place both within the football industry and wider society. Accordingly, a brief historical detour is illustrative of the landscape in which Ghanaian football academies have emerged and operate in the interstices between sport, migration and development.

Football academies, national development and Bosman

Following independence from colonial rule in 1957, Ghana's first president Kwame Nkrumah sought to implement a program of socialist reform in line with the era's dominant belief in the State as the guiding force behind development. This involved implementing 'developmental state policies', such as maintaining a large public sector and providing universal healthcare and education. In addition, President Nkrumah saw sport, especially football, as having the capacity to aid the national development process by mobilizing Ghanaians around a shared identity (Darby, 2013b). The Nkrumah government embarked on an intensive process of what would now be viewed as state-led 'sport development', by which we mean 'programmes designed to assist those engaged in organized sport- athletes, coaches, officials, administrators and to strengthen the infrastructure of facilities and institutions within which organized sport takes place' (Kidd 2008: 371). As part of this approach, the Ghanaian government invested in footballing infrastructure for youth competitions known locally as 'Colts' football. Sport development at this level was not commercially motivated, and only a handful of players migrated abroad to play football. When senior players did migrate, it was tied to furthering sport development initiatives in Ghana such as improving coaching techniques (Darby, 2010).

Moreover, because education was considered a prerequisite for individual social mobility, which would enable national development, sport development initiatives were used as a means to engage youth in formal schooling, for example through the 'Academicals' system, which involved secondary school students competing at local to national level (Esson, 2016).

Following the military coup that ended Nkrumah's reign in 1966, sport development initiatives associated with the former president were either reversed or allowed to stagnate. Moreover, the introduction of neoliberal economic policies by way of an International Monetary Fund inspired Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) during the 1980s led to a severe decrease in public expenditure. Sport development suffered as a consequence and state support for Colts football diminished significantly. Despite this, Ghanaian players performed exceptionally in the FIFA World Youth Championships and were crowned champions in 1991 and 1995. Meanwhile, in an era where mainstream development explicitly rejected calls for structural change through 'developmental state policies' and instead championed a suite of ideas usually bracketed together under the banner of neoliberalism, attempts were made to professionalize football in line with prevailing neoliberal philosophies. The Ghanaian Amateur Football Association (GAFA) became the Ghanaian Football Association (GFA) and firmly established itself as a private body, and clubs were encouraged to diversify their revenue streams and adopt business-like structures (Pannenborg, 2010). It was also during this era that the Bosman ruling was enforced which led to increasing relaxation of foreign player restrictions in professional European football and meant that clubs could increasingly sign players outside the EU (Frick, 2009).

The passing of the Bosman ruling is significant for sport development and labour migration in relation to football academies in Ghana and many other African countries, as well as those located in South America, for two reasons. Firstly, it contributed to wages in European professional football rising substantially. Therefore, in addition to their value on the field, it is argued that demand for young players from African academies increased because clubs could make significant savings by paying African players less than their counterparts from elsewhere (Poli 2006a; 2006b). For example, European clubs signed several members of Ghana's World Youth Championships winning teams and it was during this time that accounts of young African football players being exploited within the football industry began to appear in academic research and media reportage (Donnelly and Petherick, 2004). Secondly, African players were recruited from academies at an early age as part of a speculative strategy, oriented around maximising profits through onward sales (Poli, 2010). This development increasingly resulted in media allegations of human trafficking and exploitation of minors. As a consequence, FIFA introduced regulations in 2001 that banned international transfers of minors (with some exceptions). However, this has not reversed the trend of the increasing commodification of young football talent.

In Ghana, this coming together of macroeconomic development policies built on neoliberal principles, coupled with the success of the Ghanaian youth team in international tournaments, and the passing of the Bosman ruling, coalesced to fundamentally transform the way that sport and player development were operationalized within football more broadly and in academies specifically. In sum, there has been a shift away from the explicit framing of sport development, football academies and player migration as part of national development projects, to an

understanding of football academies as sites for identifying, developing and commodifying sporting talent to be traded on the international transfer market to generate profits. In the discussion that follows, we examine how this shift has impacted on African football migration and the academies that seek to facilitate it, in relation to broader processes of social and economic development at the micro-and meso-level.

Sport development and the commodification of talent

The commodification of athletic skills and attributes via the academy system is not unique to Ghana or men's football, and is rather emblematic of a global football industry that makes use of transnational labour. Individual success stories abound, however, most players in Africa who are recruited by academies remain in their 'home' country, with only a relatively small number obtaining opportunities to play football abroad (Poli, 2010). The potential to make a profit by transferring a player abroad has proved a catalyst for the emergence of a variety of academies as outlined above. Yet, the question remains if there is a long-term contribution for sport development through these new institutional arrangements that appear to foreground the commodification of athletic skill and labour mobility. We can see this tension between sport-development and the commodification of athletic skill via the academy system unfolding in Ghana and other African countries.

The case of the Ivorian academy ASEC Mimosas is often described as a template for talent and sport development. While it has produced a number of players who have embarked on successful international careers, it has also contributed to the success of the Ivorian national team, particularly since the 1990s after the academy

was professionalised. Players like Romaric, Kolo Touré and Yaya Touré are some of the outstanding graduates of the academy who made careers in European football and were part of Ivory Coast's winning squad at the African Cup of Nations in 2015. In addition, ASEC Mimosas has won several Ivorian championships and the African Champions League in 1998. Hence, the academy has contributed to the improvement of national football as well as producing talent for the export market. The example of Red Bull Ghana provides a counter to this success story. In 2008, the energy drinks company invested several million euros in a facility in Ghana's Volta Region. The academy teams did not take part in official youth leagues and refrained from engaging with the local game for many years due to a view that it would be counter-productive to their players' development. However, as a result of failing to produce enough players for the parent club in Austria or for sale on the international market, Red Bull terminated their Ghanaian academy project in 2014. Still, Red Bull Ghana did produce several players who have graduated from the academy to the domestic Ghanaian league and they also sponsored a local amateur side and provided equipment and technical support. Hence, the sport-development impact of the academy is visible in West African football today, although on a relatively modest level.

In general, as these two cases reveal, professional academies' approaches to talent production primarily follow sportive and economic goals that contribute to the commodification of players; yet their efforts to contribute to local sport development may differ significantly. In the next section, we elaborate further on the nexus between academies and their contribution to social development in Ghana, particularly by focussing on players' individual aspirations and family dynamics therein.

Academies and social development: individual aspirations and family dynamics

There is evidence, although limited, to indicate that elite academies set up by European teams have used the rubric of corporate social responsibility to signal their potential for broader development impacts on Ghanaian society. The former Fetteh Feyenoord Academy, sponsored by its partner club based in Rotterdam, provided peer education around HIV/AIDS in partnership with UNICEF, and Red Bull Ghana provided infrastructure for fresh drinking water in neighbouring villages and donated equipment to a hospital (Darby, 2013a). Moreover, other, private-owned academies promote the idea of local and cultural development by taking a cosmopolitan approach to education (Dubinsky and Schler 2017). Some private/corporate-sponsored academies go further, and attempt to contribute to wider development agendas by up-scaling individual benefits to the broader community and societal level through encouraging trainees to take part in community projects and entrepreneurial activities in African contexts. Meanwhile, a range of academies provide employment for local coaches, teachers, construction workers, and support the activities of a whole plethora of local micro-businesses (Darby, 2013a).

Yet, it is perhaps not through these initiatives that football academies and social and economic development intersect most profoundly. Many young boys from underprivileged backgrounds now view football academies as sites enabling them to become agents of development through cultivating opportunities to migrate. The belief that migration and development are interrelated now constitutes a dominant narrative within wider cultural meanings of mobility circulating within Ghana (Collins et al. 2013; Martin et al. 2016). Thus, while many academy prospects are keen to

migrate to play at a higher level and progress their careers (Darby, 2013a), the desire to migrate is not reducible to football-related aspirations solely. Moreover, and as touched upon above, successive Ghanaian governments have adopted neoliberal reform, and in a society devoid of State welfare the belief that football offers a means to earn an income is appealing because it tallies with prevailing ideologies that encourage people to be self-sufficient and instrumental. An ironic outcome of this situation, given that one of the touted developmental benefits of attending an elite academy is the provision of a quality education, is that a football career is now seen as a way to sidestep a formal education system argued to lead to either unemployment or employment in the informal economy (cf. Esson, 2016; Rolleston and Oketch, 2008).

The increasing involvement of former professional players and the professionalization of academies gives hope to today's budding talents, but the experience of being released by an academy or concluding their training without obtaining a transfer overseas, and the loss of status and sense of shame that this elicits, also feeds into a renewed belief that with effort, luck and religious faith, they will eventually migrate and make it as a professional player (Esson 2015b). Often, this belief is misplaced and serves to prolong the pursuit of social and economic development both for the individual concerned and their family (Van der Meij and Darby, 2016). This point is a good example of how the conceptual shift from a macro- to a meso-level of analysis has led to research that understands the academy player as being situated within larger aggregates, particularly the family but also peer groups, communities and a whole host of social institutions, and a concomitant realisation that these actors engage with the player and inform their understandings of how best to develop their careers.

Families are often pivotal to decisions around the migration (or otherwise) of football-playing family members to an academy, a point that was until recently neglected in the wider literature. For example, due to societal norms where Ghanaian children and youth are taught to show deference to their elders, and given that most of these players are minors, i.e. under the age of 18, they rarely make these decisions on their own. Van der Meij and Darby (2017) have been instructive in addressing this oversight by introducing the work of scholars such as Hein De Haas (2010), who are working on the migration-development nexus, to discussions about football academies. More specifically, they have advocated De Haas' (2012) call for migration decisions to be understood as part of broader attempts by households to diversify their income streams and overcome constraints to improve their life chances in their places of origin. Here, the decision to pursue a transnational football career is often made as part of a household livelihood strategy, with football increasingly seen by Ghanaian families as a way to improve their limited socio-economic prospects.

The route to success in football is highly competitive and very few will succeed (Büdel and Ungruhe 2016; Ungruhe 2017). There are no guarantees that a period of extended, often residential, training at an academy will allow players to gain social mobility via a sustained career abroad. This points to a divergence between the expectations of players and their family members and the reality for most, which is a future characterised by 'involuntary immobility', whereby there is a discrepancy between their desire to migrate through football and their ability to do so. Thus, for the majority, the pursuit of a career in the game abroad and a player's (and family members) investment in their academy training frequently results in costs rather than developmental gains. While the education that some of the more structured

academies provide may off-set some of these costs, most players who fail to move overseas on conclusion or termination of their academy training remain committed to the pursuit of football related mobility, and this can compound their difficulties in terms of potentially acquiring social mobility in other ways.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that in a context where academies are seen as vehicles for generating an income and helping one's family attain social mobility, but competition for opportunities to do so is fierce (circa 18,000 hopefuls attended trials for 15 places at the Right to Dream Academy), there have been numerous documentaries and journalistic pieces about human traffickers and clubs exploiting the aspirations of young African would-be transnational professional footballers (Hawkins, 2015; McDougall, 2008; *Soccer's Lost Boys*, 2010). On the one hand, these accounts have drawn attention to cases where after handing over money to an intermediary, a young African player obtains a contract or trial with a club, but it is of an exploitative nature akin to modern slavery. Or, where alleged interest from a foreign club is a sham and, the intermediary takes his fee but abandons the player once they arrive in a destination country. On the other hand, these accounts depict young Africans through a lens of powerlessness and desperation via an uncritical 'escape from poverty discourse' (Van der Meij and Darby 2014). Moreover, there is often an implicit assumption that creating more academies of a better standard and improving the wider football infrastructure will limit the desire to migrate, and thereby reduce the exposure of young African players to individuals seeking to exploit them. In both cases attention is diverted away from the broader structural conditions, highlighted above, that funnel youth into the football industry in the first place.

Conclusions and future research agendas

This chapter illustrated how attempts at social development through sport in general, and football academies in particular, are rarely individual projects, but are rather grounded in wider social processes and discourses, including understandings of migration and development as interlinked. We demonstrated how football academies can and do interact with these processes and discourses to produce advantageous outcomes. Yet the chapter also highlighted how calls for the creation of more elite football academies, as part of sport-development and/or sport for development agendas, ignores how the professionalization of football, including the rise in elite academies, reproduces aspirations among individuals, families, communities and a whole host of social institutions to achieve social development through the commodified and transnationally mobile professional athlete. Given football's predilection for a profit driven speculative strategy (Agergaard and Ungruhe, 2016), it is somewhat understandable that clubs would view having a ready supply of aspirational youthful talent as an advantage not a hindrance. However, this chapter qualifies this perception by showing how these aspirations, and the people they are tied to, will invariably exceed the capacity of the professional football industry to accommodate all would-be professional players. Consequently, the numbers who will unsuccessfully invest in a football career through the academy system will increase.

Concern regarding professional football's inability to accommodate young would-be professional players brings us to the first key area in need of further research, specifically, longitudinal methodological studies that examine the post-academy trajectories of young players who are released by their club. For example, as documented above, existing research has observed a strong migratory disposition

among trainees in African football academies, and has noted how this disposition relates to broader social narratives and understandings of development through spatial mobility. Yet comparatively little is known about 'the social dynamics and agency at play when players' academy training concludes without them becoming internationally mobile' (Van der Meij, Darby and Liston, 2016: 186) - an oversight that is particularly troubling since African footballers frequently face precarious career transitions and challenging livelihoods after having ended their career (Agergaard and Ungruhe 2016).

There is also a need for research capable of conceptualising regulations and policy responses that enable young people and wider society to benefit from development through sport, while also ensuring that young people are protected from abuse and exploitation by sporting institutions and/or associated individuals. This conceptual clarity is needed given that, for example, FIFA regulations, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and the Sustainable Development Goals appear at odds with each other when applied to young African players at football academies. This incompatibility is evident if one looks at the ban on international transfers involving minors. The ban was introduced by FIFA to protect children from harmful practices that surround player recruitment, including human trafficking and modern slavery, and thereby corresponds with key principles of the UNCRC and SDGs. This chapter has shown how harmful practices continue to thrive despite the ban, and at the same time some young players are denied the opportunity to migrate and pursue a career in football under circumstances that might prove beneficial in relation to other key principles of the UNCRC, such as the child's right to an adequate standard of living (Article 27), and the Sustainable Development Goals regarding quality education. The Ghanaian case is particularly

illustrative here, as research indicates that if a European club with the infrastructure to train and educate a player to a high standard were to try and recruit a talented young Ghanaian, it is likely that the player (and his family) would be keen to take this opportunity to potentially improve their life chances. Problematically, this attempt at development through migration would most likely contravene the ban on the international transfer of minors. Further research is therefore needed to untangle this conceptual and regulatory quagmire.

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