

The social dynamics of football (5)

Not everyone agrees on the effects of the popularity of football. In a 2017 article from campaignlive.co.uk, marketing expert Harry Lang details the profitable economics of football, an aspect relayed in the Forbes chart on players' salaries, while the academic John Dart in *The Conversation* argues that football is more than just a cog in the capitalist system, a view amplified by both Clint Smith in an opinion piece for *The Guardian* and the front page of *The Daily Mirror* published just after England's Euro 2020 semi-final victory. All together, the corpus explores the extent to which football is more than just a game. (97)

From once humble beginnings, football has evolved into a globalized phenomenon. While still being an opportunity for children to have fun kicking a ball around (doc.1), football is played in cross continental tournaments or mega-events like the Euro 2020 (doc.2). Footballers move seamlessly from one country to another, playing for cities in foreign countries (doc.4). Yet, paradoxically, there is also a strong sense of nationalism in football which is illustrated by the rhetoric used on the front page of *The Daily Mirror*. England's victory has repaired wounded national pride, the victory over the 'Danes' seems akin to revenge for the 8th century viking invasion. For some, this is part of the darker side of football today, the violence, hatred and bigotry (Doc.1). (120)

A whole capitalist economic ecosystem has built up around the game. It has basically become an entertainment behemoth which generates billions of dollars in revenue from media rights, merchandising and other spin-off products, not to mention ticket sales. Endless cash flows into and out of the game (doc.3). Footballers themselves have monetary value through merchandising and transfer fees, the top players' salaries run into the millions per annum (doc.4). This system is, however, subject to criticism. To those who see the whole business of professional sports as smoke and mirrors, diverting fans' attention away from pressing social issues that are left aside, can be

opposed that sport is seen by some as a mere mechanism of social control, a cog in the wheel of capitalism, in a similar way that religion was viewed by Marx (doc.1). (136)

There does indeed appear to be a quasi-religious aspect to football. Even if it is not a question of life or death (doc.3), the members of England's victorious 66 squad are considered as immortals (doc.5). During the Euro 2020, the resuscitation of Denmark's Christian Eriksen was presented as almost miraculous (doc.2), due in part to the crowd's spontaneous call and response, a collective prayer willing the player to live. Football, like other sports, can give meaning to people's lives, sparking unspeakable emotions (doc.1&2) and a sense of intense fan loyalty mentioned (doc.3). Stadiums are hallowed ground where strangers come together through ritual chants and anthems which give them a sense of belonging in a world where community spirit is otherwise on the wane (doc.2). (124)

Clearly then, for better or for worse, football is now more than just the game it once was. (18)

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