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The *European Super League* debacle: why regulation of corporate football is essential

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ABSTRACT

On 18 April 2021, 12 European football clubs collectively issued a letter of intent to form a new *European Super League*. This attempted coup was strongly opposed across English football. Afterwards, the responsible owner-oligarchs were singled out for special criticism from pundits and supporter organizations alike. What emerged was a focus upon the personal greed and social indifference of those individuals, but what was less forthcoming in the days following was an analysis capable of putting the ‘greed thesis’ into a more effective social, economic, and even historical context. This article strives for a more sociological understanding of the April 18th coup, to understand better the broader social developments in the political economy of English football from which the coup has come into being. This article calls for regulatory reform of professional football in England, to show why such reform is not merely more plausible now but more necessary.

Introduction

Greed. That is the widely endorsed explanation given for the attempt almost a year ago by six of the richest and most powerful owner-oligarchs in English football to establish a new *European Super League* (ESL) by unilateral decision in April 2021. After a highly clandestine gestation period, the ESL project was unleashed upon the World on the 18th of April, but by the end of a heady 48-h period it was dead in the water. However, the short timeframe of the events around this saga ought not to distract us from the significance of what happened, and the seriousness of what took place should not be underestimated. The consequences of those 48 hours for English football could be profound.

The point in this article is to position this event into a broader historical, social, and economic context, so that we can better understand how this event relates to what has been going on around us in professional football for some time. Most importantly, this social and economic positioning will enable us to integrate the ‘greed thesis’ into a more comprehensive, systematic, and politically articulate framework, in order that we might grasp how human malfeasance is only part of the problem and just one element in the explanation. Whilst the ethical condemnation in the greed-thesis is a necessary component of any proper political response to the ESL debacle, it must not allow a more durable strategic response to be side-lined and neutralized by well-timed apologies, tactical misdirection, feigned contrition, and quick footwork on the part of corporate PR departments, which were always going to be the inevitable sequel to the coup’s failure. By integrating the

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greed-thesis into a bigger sociological picture, we can argue more effectively that a deeper *social* response to the attempted coup of April 18 is necessary, and how regulation of the political economy of football has become both more imperative *and* more plausible.

What I want to explain is how the alarming events of April 18 are neither random, epiphenomenal, nor accidental, but entirely understandable, structurally familiar, and even predictable to a great extent. I also want to demonstrate how the reaction to the attempted coup, whilst necessary, critically productive, inspiring, and in some conspicuous instances courageous, has brought out a fundamental problem with the way corporate football is approached by its critics – *internal contradiction* – and how this contradiction not only needs to be explicitly addressed but how it requires us to take a sociological view of the matter, whether we are inclined to do so or not. This contradiction in football is actually the proximate manifestation of a much larger societal contradiction in modern capitalism, and, in order to analyse it, I shall be enlisting the explanatory power of Karl Polanyi's presentation of the historical emergence of the *Market Society*. The reason for doing so will be clarified as we go along, but at this stage, I can simply say that Polanyi's analytic insights into modern liberal capitalism provide a strong base from which to make the argument for the regulation of corporate football, so as at the very least to save it from itself. However, before we get to the analysis, we need to get our heads around the narrative details of the ESL debacle itself.

The ESL coup of April 2021

So what exactly is the ESL project, and what actually happened on and after 18 April 2021? In brief, 12 European football clubs collectively issued a letter of intent to form a new European so-called 'Super League', of which they would be the founder members.¹ These clubs – three Italian (AC Milan, Inter Milan, Juventus), three Spanish (Athletico Madrid, Barcelona, Real Madrid), and six English (Arsenal, Chelsea, Liverpool, Manchester City, Manchester United, Tottenham Hotspur) – would constitute the permanent core of the new super league with 5–8 places made available for other clubs to join or leave the league annually on the basis of performance in other subordinate European competitions or in national leagues. The proposal was that these clubs would play each other throughout the course of the normal European footballing season (September–June), but in parallel to existing European and domestic competitions.

The first significant fact about this move is that these 12 clubs constitute a majority of the richest and most influential corporate entities in World football, and together with a couple of conspicuous absences (i.e. Bayern Munich, Borussia Dortmund, Paris Saint-Germain), they accumulate (not generate) the lion's share of European football's annual revenue. The second significant fact is that the proposed ESL would be constituted and structured in such a way as to rule out the possibility that any of the 12 founder clubs would or could ever be relegated from the Super League. This stands in stark contrast to the current UEFA Champions League system, whereby teams that are successful in their respective domestic/national competitions (i.e. Premier League, Serie A, Bundesliga, etc.) earn the right to compete annually in the prestigious and lucrative Champions League competition over the course of the next season. The winner of this competition is crowned European Champion, and although European Champions are almost invariably to be found amongst these 12 clubs, access to the competition each year is by no means guaranteed (as Manchester United, Liverpool, and Arsenal have discovered over the last several years, to their great discomfort).

The combined effect of these two facts would be to create a guaranteed monopoly over access to television money that Champions League football currently provides, as well as other connected revenues such as sponsorship deals, which of course would be guaranteed in a way that it currently is not in the existing UEFA competitions, such as the Champions League and the somewhat less prestigious Europa League.

Reaction across the spectrum was fairly unanimous. From the governing bodies of European and English football (UEFA, FA), the UK government, players, managers, pundits, and from the public at large, the reaction was almost universal condemnation of the proposal. Very quickly alarm gave way to fairly unvarnished disgust at the actual coup attempt. The dominant interpretation of the move, which solidified over the succeeding couple of days, emphasized greed and cynical opportunism on the part of the relevant owner-oligarchs. The President of UEFA even went so far as to speak of 'liars' and 'snakes' behind the project.²

In England, this broad and immediate reaction coalesced around a number of more specific themes.³ Aside from the personal greed of the owner-oligarchs, the first objection revolved around the threat to sporting competition in the monopolizing aspirations of the ESL project, which were widely considered to transgress the acceptable norms of association football, to challenge the longstanding spirit of English football in particular, and to threaten the historic 'pyramid' structure of the English league system that is deemed so vital for the long-term survival of the national game. Second in importance was the unilateral and clandestine way in which the project had been planned and the decision released to the public as a *fait accompli*, and which was considered arrogant and highhanded. The timing of the attempted coup, amidst a global pandemic, was also singled out for especial opprobrium. The reaction emphasized a misanthropic cynicism on the part of the owner-oligarchs, who demonstrated in their coup little sensitivity to the widespread suffering caused in the pandemic, as well as the psychological and emotional succour that the entire pyramid of English football has provided for millions of fans throughout the traumatic and difficult period of the COVID-19 lockdowns. Finally, the apparent incompetence and naivety of the owner-oligarchs, as well as their advisors and their public relations 'weasels',⁴ was remarked upon, because going ahead with a project so inevitably loathed was taken as evidence of an elitist and wilful disconnection from the general population on the part of the owner-oligarchs.

All these criticisms seem accurate and fair enough, but what is conspicuous about these criticisms is that they all focus upon the malign agency of individuals in high places, and little time and effort has been given over to a more sociological analysis of professional football's political economy or the systemic and structural forces at work. This is what we need to inject into the discourse on the ESL project and the coup attempt of April 18. To say that 'it all boils down to the greed from the top clubs that doesn't [sic] allow the money to filter through properly' is to miss the point somewhat.⁵ We need an explanation of the coup that integrates all of the above elements in the reaction to the ESL project, but which penetrates to a more profound social and economic layer of understanding.⁶ This will not only frame the agency of the owner-oligarchs in a way that enables us to comprehend their aims and actions more effectively but will allow us to understand why apologies and reassurances are not sufficient and how formal and substantive regulation of corporate football is now more necessary than ever.

Accumulation, competition, and monopoly

At this point, we need to shift onto a more abstract plane of analysis, so as to clarify the very real material relations in which we are practically immersed. This kind of analysis has the power to order our mundane experiences in the social sphere of football, but in a way that enables us to think critically about how football is governed and organized.

The first thing to clarify is that the ESL gambit to establish a monopoly position is driven by certain forces and pressures that are immanent to a capitalist logic of social organization through time. Namely, that monopoly is the end and object of market competition, not its straightforward antithesis, and that in the absence of intervening regulation from the social and political sphere, the dynamic of the autonomous market in combination with the intrinsic tendencies of capital accumulation will result in the emergence of monopoly and oligopoly.⁷ To entertain or even accept this understanding is not to deny the greed and malfeasance on the part of corporate oligarchs, but to extend our critical energies into a proper *analysis* of what is happening, and in so doing assign the

role of greed to its proper place in a much more comprehensive and encompassing explanation of the ESL debacle. We must always bear in mind that the cynical greed of oligarchs can only be possible if there are oligarchs in the first place, which of course is a matter of political economy and social structure, and that socially embedded and democratic political control over social entities is the surest way to render greedy and megalomaniacal motives impotent socially and governable politically.

This initial insight regarding competition and monopoly is likely to raise some sceptical eyebrows. There is a lot of talk nowadays, and not just in football, about free-markets and the untouchable autonomy of free-market competition as though it were some homoeostatic and totalizing kind of enclosed system. The words are expressed in almost mystical and hallowed tones, at least partially because the ways of the Market are truly mystifying and obfuscating.⁸ A little rational and historical analysis, however abstract, can reveal not merely some fascinating truths regarding the reality of the market institution, but some crucially serious reasons for questioning how we talk about them. What is truly interesting is how the various condemnations of the ESL coup attempt that have rippled across the pundit landscape have also, with a few laudable exceptions, been followed immediately by reassuring remarks regarding the role of money, finance, and free markets in professional football. The fixed and repetitive form in which these reassurances have been uttered by tepid critics gives the impression that these individuals at least feel themselves to be under surveillance from some great monitoring force vigilantly ensuring their loyalty to the rhetoric of free-market ideology. Denounce the greedy, but do not question the system! From pundits through former players to fan channel hosts, examples are easy to find.⁹

So here we have a lot of reassurances about the desirability of money power, market forces, and free-markets in football, and how any condemnation of the ESL project is not a rejection of market ideology, market behaviour, and most importantly market competition. What is so wrong about these reassurances, one might ask? A lot, if the practical long-term outcome of this eulogistic talk about markets is not the generation of competitive outcomes, but the unhappy production of monopoly, oligopoly, and ultimately of course *oligarchy*.

Irrespective of the romanticized ideal of market exchange, the capitalist logic is about *accumulation*,¹⁰ and at the heart of capitalist accumulation is 'the specific economic form in which unpaid surplus labour is pumped out of the direct producers'.¹¹ The manner in which this accumulation is achieved constitutes the 'decisive element' of a capitalist mode of production. It is the accumulation of surpluses produced, as well as their recycling in circuits of production, distribution, and consumption, that lies at the heart of capitalism as a system.¹² It is the accumulation of surpluses that are ultimately reinvested in further rounds of production, which is the reason for the great expansion in material productive forces that so encapsulates the capitalist mode of production, and which so captivates the sanguine imagination of capital's cheerleaders. The motor of accumulation is the *conditio sine qua non* of capitalist organization, and all other aspects of capitalist society are secondary and expendable to the overriding imperative to secure continued and expanding accumulation.¹³ The implication of this is that the cherished 'market competition' that takes centre stage in the ideological discussion of capitalism is actually just a 'secondary characteristic' in the operation of a capitalist system,¹⁴ and can be jettisoned when necessary from the actual operation of capitalist accumulation processes and structures.¹⁵ Understanding this basic insight of political economy is essential, if we want to get to a truth of capitalist logic capable of opening up the ESL project to a whole other level of analytical understanding. For this, we must understand how: 1) economic competition *ceteris paribus* tends always towards monopoly in a capitalist mode of production through time;¹⁶ and 2) monopolization, as an historical process, is an ongoing part of the accumulation process in general.¹⁷

Let us be clear first on why this is so, and then we can get to the relevance this has for the condition of English football today. Without going too far into the intricacies of the surplus absorption problem, the rising organic composition of capital, the tendency to a falling rate of profit, and other controversial issues in the arcana of political economy, we can say that there is

a tendency in laissez-faire competition for capitals to concentrate and centralize over time into fewer and fewer hands through inter-capitalist competition. The outcome then is a tendency towards ‘monopoly and oligopoly – the characteristic features of modern capitalism’.¹⁸

The battle of competition is fought by the cheapening of commodities. The cheapness of commodities depends, all other circumstances remaining the same, on the productivity of labour, and this depends in turn on the scale of production. Therefore the larger capitals beat the smaller. It will further be remembered that, with the development of the capitalist mode of production, there is an increase in the minimum amount of individual capital necessary to carry on a business under its normal conditions. The smaller capitals, therefore, crowd into spheres of production which large-scale industry has taken control of only sporadically or incompletely. Here competition rages in direct proportion to the number, and in inverse proportion to the magnitude, of the rival capitals. It always ends in the ruin of many small capitalists, whose capitals partly pass into the hands of their conquerors, and partly vanish completely.¹⁹

As commodification of football has expanded, deepened, and intensified over recent decades, and previously non-commodified aspects of the game have been turned into commodities, private property, and therefore *capital* – from players themselves and historical club grounds to badge-brands and TV rights – we have witnessed precisely this tendency towards larger and larger capitals pushing out smaller ones into lower domestic leagues (think Portsmouth, Stockport, Sheffield Wednesday, or Sunderland), smaller and peripheral foreign leagues (think Qatar or Dubai), bankruptcies (think Bury, Wigan, or maybe Derby),²⁰ and other ‘spheres of production which large-scale industry has taken control of only sporadically or incompletely’.

Immediately there arises thus a long-term contradiction between the imperative to accumulate through competition and that of the survival of the system as it is threatened by the tendency towards monopoly, which is why capitalism is inherently unstable, crisis-ridden, and unsustainable within its own dynamic over time. It is also why the systemic operation of capital accumulation requires periodic and exogenous political intervention to ensure its survival, intervention whose ultimate social and political logic must by definition be *extra commercium*, that is to say, extra-capitalist, and derived from without the immediate structures of capital.²¹ The narrative around the 2008 economic collapse and subsequent bailouts + austerity, or even that of the 1929 Crash, Great Depression of the 1930s, and the subsequent New Deal, ought to give a good indication of this intrinsic and historic feature of capitalist organization, as well as the recurrent long-term consequence of an autonomous market economy unfettered.²² As Istvan Mészáros pointed out, this was even true as far back as the late 19th century.

The big difference in the second half of the 19th century with regard to ‘commercial revulsions’ and crises was that the established production and political order was increasingly being challenged by the organized socialist movement which dared to put forward the ‘extra-economic’ proposition that economic crises are not due to cyclic extra-terrestrial disturbances, nor to the unalterable determinations of ‘human nature’, but to the fundamental structural defects of the capital system.²³

Without intervention to reformulate, reposition, reshape, or reset the terrain of inter-capitalist competition, it will destroy itself through monopolization and consequent crises in accumulation that the tendency engenders, because over time the ‘necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands, and thus the restoration of monopoly in a more terrible form’.²⁴

Understanding the nature of economic competition under capitalist conditions is important for our purposes here, because there is a tragic but unsurprising tendency amongst professional footballers, commentators, pundits, and football fans to conflate the reality of market competition with the ethical and cultural ideal of competition that informs their sporting lives. What is not acknowledged is that there is a fundamental contradiction between competition understood in the world of football, as something that is determined historically by collectively accepted norms and legally established rules of the game, and capitalist competition in the economic space that is contained by no laws other than those of accumulation and the drive towards monopoly. In the case of football, competition is understood in social and ethical terms and is regulated both formally and culturally in accord with those terms, so as to secure, perpetuate, reproduce properly competitive

conditions into the indefinite future. In the capitalist dynamic, the objective of competition through time is to end competition and replace it with monopoly. This means that the two views of competition are inexorably set on a collision course, and those who espouse free-market economic competition in football in the same breath as they defend the ethical competition typical of football culture, will find themselves mired in a deeply contradictory position. Take a look at this exchange between the presenter for the April 19th *Monday Night Football* programme and the erstwhile Manchester United right-back Gary Neville.²⁵

Presenter: But why is it different this time, Gary? Why could it destroy football as we know it?

Neville: They're creating a monopoly, a closed shop, a tournament where you're guaranteed to be in it. West Ham and Leicester are in Champions' League places. Forget it! They don't get into the Champions' League anymore. It doesn't matter where they finish in the league. What's the point? They take away everything in this country: the Pyramid, the sincerity of competition, the honesty and integrity of competition that we value, and they're taking it away . . .

Here we see the ethical and social defence of an ideal of competition essential to football culture and its almost feudal norms of restrained and honourable combat. In contrast, the ESL project is rightly portrayed as a gambit to create a monopoly out of, and behind the back of, that competitive framework. This seems like a perfectly reasonable and coherent confrontation between monopoly and competition, between the outcome of unrestrained capitalist 'competition' and a humanist ethos derived from the social lifeworld. However, Gary Neville continues where he left off . . .

. . . Yeah, we know that Manchester United have got more money, we know Liverpool have got more money, we know that Arsenal have got more money. We can live with that. There'll always be top clubs who have more money, but they can be beaten by Sheffield United at home, they can draw with Fulham, and they are trying to take that away to create franchise football. *Never!* It can never happen!²⁶

We can see here how Gary Neville is now drawn into a much more contradictory position than a moment ago. He thinks that capitalist market competition and socio-cultural sporting competition share the same dynamic and logic in the capitalist setting, a setting which he accepts as legitimate, and that can be somehow brought into a homeostatic, harmonious, stable, equilibrating, and normatively contained relationship with one another into the long term, when they are in fact in increasingly acute contradiction with each other through time. The 'free market' competition he accepts and endorses is producing both the inexorable tendency towards monopoly, as well as the conditions that make monopolizing oligarchy more possible through the constant concentration of accumulated (money) surpluses – and thus power – into the hands of ever fewer people (club owners).

This is not an idiosyncratic position but is in fact fairly representative of the contradiction-bound ways in which many talk about football, starting with those who have benefited the most from the capitalization and financialisation of the sport (pundits, managers, owners, players), and ending with the general public as naïve ideological consumers and unwitting regurgitators of that discourse. Gary Neville is not without some consciousness of this contradiction, but without the basic insight into what the capitalist accumulation dynamic entails, he is doomed to the contradiction contained in the delusion that there is an autonomous market mechanism that is indefinitely workable.

I feel slightly complicit. I've stayed pretty quiet in terms of the Glazer family over the years, stayed pretty quiet, because I've thought when the club [ManU] was taken over as a PLC that you knew it could be bought and it was out of the control of players, of fans, of everybody. I believe in a free market, generally in life, and I've always thought that'.²⁷

If these contradictory views persist and remain widespread, the problem will not go away. Further movement along the trajectory of monopolization will almost certainly be in our future, should we fail to absorb and comprehend how the contradictions of capital do not exist out there somewhere

but have become internal to football as an arena of accumulation. Over time, the contradiction of capitalist football will break out in crises of one sort or another, for the ESL coup attempt is just one moment in a string of such crises. The attempt to initiate Project Big Picture (2020) was merely the most recent instance in a long series of movements towards monopoly in corporate football since the de-regulations of the market economy were unleashed by the liberal free-market fundamentalism of the 1980s.²⁸ The founding of the Premier League itself (1992), and the more favourable structures for monopoly power that it put into place, has been rightly connected to the long tendency towards the ESL by a number of observers.²⁹ In this we can see a certain hypocrisy amongst supporters of some of the clubs implicated in the ESL debacle, who have attempted to salvage a moral high ground on the basis of their clubs more immediate U-turn under fan pressure in response to the coup failure. Though distancing themselves from the ESL coup in particular, they have failed to appreciate that their clubs have been engaging in a not entirely dissimilar project for decades now within the framework of the Premier League, a model which has had deleterious effects further down the pyramid of English football.³⁰

Likewise, the contemporaneous 'rebranding' of the European Cup into the Champions League (1992) transformed a European competition only accessible to a small number of domestic league champions into a national quota system that would integrate a larger number of big clubs into a European league that was at once more exclusive and endowed with greater global accumulation power.³¹ The latter reform created a way to strengthen the revenue capturing power of a decreasingly permeable European cadre of monopolizing clubs, whilst the Champions League rebrand extended the market for its increasingly commodified 'product' into Asia, Africa, and North America through an explosion in TV viewer numbers over the subsequent decades. All of this was driven by the ideological concepts and language of capitalization and marketization.

So, when Gary Neville expresses disgust at what are the inevitable tendencies towards monopolization at the same time as he commits himself to the predominance of market competition, undergirded by an ideological belief that the autonomous market is more than just an unstable intellectual construct, he is demonstrating the underlying contradiction to which I am referring. This means that further crises in accumulation through competition will mean further coup attempts to transform English (and European) football into a more secure monopoly power over accumulation until the contradiction is resolved.

If we accept that the autonomous, homoeostatic, free market is a myth, and that intervention of some sort from without that sphere is going to be necessary, the next step is to ask ourselves what this intervention will be and from where it will come. In order to do this, we have to understand how the autonomous market is utopian, what it is juxtaposed against, why it is in another contradiction with society, and why that contradiction requires regulation from the social sphere. This brings us to Karl Polanyi, the notion of *social embeddedness*, and the so-called 'double movement'.

Market economy vs. society

Though some might envisage the future of world football enduring indefinitely in an asignifying digital and 'global' space disconnected from the signified lived life of particular place,³² it is vital to grasp how 'consumers' of the football 'product' are actually drawn to semiotic meanings, emotional registers, physical atmospheres, affective investments, and the cultural connections that have been commodified out of football as a lived experience by those who now own the historic 'brands' and symbols of social football. Furthermore, the craftwork and skill of footballing artisans, to whom TV viewers are drawn, have been acquired and honed in the vocational training made possible by the social 'pyramid' of English football and its surrounding cultural stock of tradition, experience, and knowledge.³³ Football cannot long survive in a contrived and utopian 'no place', and the more the marketization of football removes it from its social context, the greater its disintegrative crisis tendencies will become.

The point about the ESL project, and the move towards monopoly power that it involves, is that the mid-/long-term consequence of the Super League would be the emaciation and immiseration of the domestic leagues that are left behind by the ESL clubs. Over recent decades, these clubs have accumulated huge surpluses out of value that is actually produced from the wider society around football, by the innumerable participants, players, supporters, crowds, schools, parks, grounds-keepers, teachers, pubs, local businesses, municipal authorities, players' families and friends, volunteer officials, even St John's Ambulance people, not to mention the small army of clubs' staff and personnel that keep the show on the road. This society around football goes right down through the league pyramid, draws on its surrounding culture, and has contributed to the production of the English football 'product' that is commodified and marketed across the world.³⁴ In a manner similar to Google, YouTube, or Facebook, monopolizing clubs have constructed revenue-securing enclosures around these commodity-constituting value streams by securing property rights over the principal ways of packaging, monetizing, and marketing that value – principally through branding and privatized TV rights.³⁵ By moving to an exclusive and monopolized European Super League, which would almost inevitably entail the eventual and real departure of these clubs from their respective domestic leagues, the recycling of those surpluses back into the social loam of the football league pyramid that has nourished these clubs for decades will be severed with cataclysmic consequences on the financial organization and prospective surplus re-investment into those domestic leagues. In 2008, we understood the truth behind the classic epigram imputed by Marx to the finance capitalist – *après moi, le déluge* – a recognition of the irresponsible devastations that unfettered capital accumulation wreaks on itself as well as upon society at large. This is what many observers fear for the 'people's game', if the ESL project is realized. The rest of this section explains why and how this would be so.

In his famous work on the Industrial Revolution in Britain – *The Great Transformation* (1944) – Karl Polanyi synthesized the powerful analyses of Marx, Weber, Tönnies, Malinowski, and a gamut of political economists, social analysts, anthropologists, and institutionalists,³⁶ in order to arrive at a certain insight into the long-term operations of modern liberal capitalism, drawing particular attention to 'market fundamentalism and its disastrous consequences for democracy'.³⁷ For Polanyi, the hegemony of liberal capitalism throughout the industrializing processes of the long 19th century culminated in what E. H. Carr famously referred to as the *Twenty Years' Crisis*,³⁸ a period of radical instability, volatility, and depression in the World between 1919 and 1939, and which was disastrously bracketed by two world wars that were the direct corollary of the Great Transformation. So what was at the core of this Great Transformation? The answer was the historically unique emergence of the *Market Society* through the course of the long 19th century.

Within the fraught unity of the Market Society, Polanyi distinguished two dimensions or spheres. The coexistence of these spheres has been essential to the emergence and then survival of modern capitalism, though they are in a constant state of contradiction with each other. When that contradictory tension increases through time, crises of capitalism (large and small) come into being. These two dimensions are *Market Economy* and *Society*, which together constitute *Market Society*.

Through his historical analysis of modern capitalism, Polanyi's fundamental thesis was that 'the origins of the cataclysm lay in the utopian endeavour of economic liberalism to set up a self-regulating market system' through the 19th and into the 20th century,³⁹ instead of recognizing the perpetual need for impersonal markets to be *embedded* anthropologically in the social, familial, communal, ecological, physical processes and relations that sustain the market economy, supply it with economic *value*, and provide the meaningful and real world in which humans actually live as sensuous mammals and emotional beings.

Our thesis is that the idea of a self-adjusting market implied a stark utopia. Such an institution could not exist for any length of time without annihilating the human and natural substance of society; it would have physically destroyed man and transformed his surroundings into a wilderness. Inevitably, society took measures to protect itself but whatever measures it took impaired the self-regulation of the market,

disorganized industrial life, and thus endangered society in yet another way. It was this dilemma which forced the development of the market system into a definite groove and finally disrupted the social organization based upon it.⁴⁰

So let us be clear about the terms. *Market Economy* implies a 'self-regulating system of markets', and an economy 'directed by market prices and nothing but market prices', which is deemed 'capable of organizing the whole of economic life without outside help or interference'.⁴¹ To create a reasonably assured production (and uninterrupted accumulation, of course), the motive of subsistence is replaced by that of gain, all transactions become money transactions, all incomes must be derived from a sale of some sort. The institutionalized pattern of this behaviour is the basic *Market System*. This system, left to function without interference in the free movement of prices, constitutes the *Market Economy*.⁴² Approaching the emergence of this market economy historically, Polanyi noted how

... once it is established, it must be allowed to function without outside interference. Profits are not any more guaranteed, and the merchant must make his profits on the market. Prices must be allowed to regulate themselves. Such a self-regulating system of markets is what we mean by a market economy.⁴³

However, Polanyi noticed how the self-regulating market is actually 'utopian' and 'unsustainable on its own terms'.⁴⁴ It is one of the 'economic superstitions of the nineteenth century',⁴⁵ and cannot in actuality exist without the sphere of society. It is a tendency towards, rather than a reality in itself.

In contrast to this economic sphere, *Society* refers to the assimilating medium or encompassing milieu of relations by which human life exists in a sustained and enduring relationship with the natural environment, the qualities of associated life, the intuitive needs of the human organism.⁴⁶ It is that sphere in which the human person is concerned with their 'social standing', their 'social claims', and their 'social assets',⁴⁷ and in which *belonging* is not merely a frustration to rational calculation but something of immense importance. It is the relations of 'reciprocity' and 'redistribution' that temper the impersonal and reified relations of the market economy through long-standing kinship, familial, identity, regional and communal relations.⁴⁸ It alludes to relations that are governed by principles of behaviour not primarily associated with economics, but culture, custom, and psycho-social life, which not only ensure stability, order, continuity, harmony in production and distribution, but meaningful existence for the human as a complicated social, emotional, and even hormonal animal. In short, it is the *Gemeinschaft* of communal life.⁴⁹

Through an anthropological and historical argument, Polanyi challenged the complacent liberal presumption of Adam Smith and others that markets simply emerge spontaneously from supposedly natural human propensities to 'truck, barter and exchange',⁵⁰ and instead demonstrated historically a different axiom reminiscent of Durkheim: markets are established by legal and political institution-building on the part of the state.⁵¹

There was nothing natural about *laissez-faire*; free markets could never have come into being merely by allowing things to take their course. Just as cotton manufactures – the leading free trade industry – were created by the help of protective tariffs, export bounties, and indirect wage subsidies, *laissez-faire* itself was enforced by the state.⁵²

This means that attempts to create a self-regulating market for commodified and monetized objects capable of being ordered quantitatively through the price mechanism would require the dense and infinite complexities of human social life to be artificially or 'fictitiously' turned into quantifiable objects by legislation, spatial manipulation, ideology, and even direct physical coercion. This was 'the mechanism through which the old social tissue was destroyed and a new integration of man and nature so unsuccessfully attempted' in the form of market relations.⁵³ In this way, human beings, the ecological or natural environments of their 'species-being',⁵⁴ and the relations between them, would be turned into the 'fictitious commodities' of *labour*, *land*, and *money*, so as to be rendered into metrics and thus marketable through the mechanism of price.⁵⁵ Of course, *labour* is actually human lives, *land* is the place where those lives are lived, and *money* changes the intimate, direct, rich, and infinitely meaningful relations amongst those lives into an anonymous and lifeless metric.

The degree to which these aspects of complex and subtle human life are commodified, and the degree therefore to which ‘a market economy is forced upon an entirely differently organized community’, is the degree to which we are faced with ‘the liquidation of every and any cultural institution in an organic society’.⁵⁶

Herein lies the contradiction between *Market Economy* and *Society*, between what Polanyi labelled ‘improvement’ and ‘habitation’.⁵⁷ On the one hand, the dubious commodification of the uncommodifiable, so as to create objects digestible by the impersonal workings of the market system and its all-powerful price mechanism. On the other hand, the tendency towards interpersonal alienation and the social/cultural/environmental devastation of material and immaterial human habitation, as those commodifications cut through the more meaningful, sophisticated, immediate, dense, visceral, intimate, emotional, even spiritual relations of life as it is lived by social and ecological humans in a place where it ‘belongs’. Whilst the fictitious commodifications of life facilitate the capitalization of life and the great enhancement of organized productive force as realized in the *Market Economy*,⁵⁸ the de-humanizing effects of commodification for market exchange threaten the long-term survival of associated human life in the milieu of *Society*, upon which the *Market Economy* ultimately depends. In a great variety of ways, society pushes back against these fictitious commodifications. The bounding leaps of enforced marketization are followed spontaneously in one form or another by the compensating resistance of society, and at some point ‘the economy will revert to a more embedded position’.⁵⁹ Countermovement from social football *will* emerge, the question concerns the what, where, and how.

In a way that brings this analysis back into relation with contemporary football, the ex-footballer and BBC pundit Danny Murphy summarized the connection quite well. He tellingly emphasized the single word ‘soulless’ to describe the ESL project *in toto*,⁶⁰ going on to juxtapose it to ‘the supporters, or the tradition, or the history, or the passion of the fans and the clubs and the cities that we know’. He specifically alluded to ‘four fantastic divisions in our league that we have – what? – over a hundred years created, this wonderful pyramid that we’ve got in our country we’re proud of. I mean that could capitulate overnight, couldn’t it, if this was to happen?’ Of course, these comments were restricted to the ESL debacle, and the insight was not extended to a longer timeframe that would encompass other episodes like the founding of the Premier League. However, if this critique can be applied to the ESL project, it can surely be applied to the persistent attempts made over recent decades to emplace the market system deeper and more comprehensively into English football.

The social damage wrought upon social football is a consistent feature of these attempts. We can think upon the historic football grounds in lived neighbourhoods that have been destroyed and the clubs uprooted from the social lifeworld described by Murphy for transplantation to huge out-of-town car parks next to motorways. The labour that is lived in passionate crowds of supporters is disintegrated as participation rights become unaffordable through a price mechanism that replaces supporters with tepid connoisseurs and dispassionate observers from the four corners of the planet. The replacement of local supporter-stewards with contracted private security personnel, as has been the case at West Ham’s new London Stadium. The increasing semiotic strain placed upon club symbols (shirts, logos, badges) as they are disseminated across the global market and appropriated by individuals whose connection to those symbols is exclusively mediated through that market. The shift of football coverage from public broadcasting to private TV rights. The proliferation of more and more matches to be broadcast, more ‘content’ to be sold,⁶¹ irrespective of the effect upon players, supporters, clubs, and communities. The scattered restructuring of match fixtures from weekend afternoon’s to midweek and evening fixtures, so as to maximize broadcasting surface area, but which can only be disintegrative of the immediate communal experience at the heart of social football on the ground.

These are just some instantly recognizable developments in which we can intuitively perceive the fictitious commodifications of labour and land in the football ‘product’, as well as their long term destruction through that process of commodification, marketization, and therefore monetization. As social football has been fictitiously commodified, it has steadily disintegrated the societal bonds

and relations that produce the value appropriated by those commodifications. One must understand how value is produced in social football through the ‘universal and communal labour’, or *general labour*, of those who participate in it. Crucially, the value in the product of this labour is ‘brought about partly by the cooperation of men now living, but partly also by building on earlier work’.⁶² Based on the general idea of the *commons*, this labour is the ‘accumulated general intellect (and affect) of humankind’, which is ‘produced through the channels of social cooperation beyond the capital-relation’.⁶³ As the general labour that contributes to the football ‘product’ becomes alienated by the ‘soulless’ tendency towards market economy in football, the affective and symbolic meanings are lessened and the connection of lived life to football is weakened. In short, the constant commodification, monetization, and marketization of football is destroying the source of value in its ‘product’, as well as the social habitation of all those who live through football culture and who depressingly sense its gradual dissolution.

The disintegration and meaninglessness that more and more people in social football seem to sense unfolding in the English game reveals the truth in Polanyi’s insight into how ‘a social calamity is primarily a cultural not an economic phenomenon that can be measured by income figures or population statistics’,⁶⁴ which also explains how more and more of us feel that social football is disintegrating regardless of arguments about its income-generating power as a British export industry.

Not economic exploitation, as often assumed, but the disintegration of the cultural environment of the victim is then the cause of the degradation. The economic process may, naturally, supply the vehicle of the destruction, and almost invariably economic inferiority will make the weaker yield, but the immediate cause of his undoing is not for that reason economic; it lies in the lethal injury to the institutions in which his social existence is embodied.⁶⁵

The implications of this globalization-type analysis are that football’s market economy must be more effectively ‘embedded’ in the social sphere and regulated in relation to that sphere. Though it might drive certain productive enhancements in the organization of capital accumulation and expansion, the dis-embedding of the economy from society is a utopian illusion doomed to failure. The short- and long-run effect of attempts to create a self-regulating market, though in somewhat different ways, is that it ‘must disjoint Man’s relationships and threaten his natural [and socio-cultural] habitat with annihilation’,⁶⁶ and this is what we are witnessing in English football today. Without purposive overview, social control has shifted from responsible human actors immersed in communal relations to a soulless and irresponsible mechanism.⁶⁷ But this is not simply a matter of opposing ethical or normative positions regarding what football authentically is, nor is it mere nostalgia, but a practical necessity in the terms of capitalist football itself. This is because ‘even capitalist business itself’ has to be ‘sheltered from the unrestricted working of the market mechanism’,⁶⁸ in order for it to survive. Regulation is not just about safeguarding human ‘habitation’, nor restoring democratic control over the impersonal mechanism of the market, but about saving the market economy itself from itself. Political and social activity to these ends is what Polanyi meant by the ‘double movement’.

Society, regulation, and the ‘Double movement’

The restoration of market ideology out of the 1970s’ crisis of capitalism, and the rise to hegemony since then of the neoliberal paradigm of political economy, has stimulated a corresponding renaissance in Polanyi’s critical analysis of *Market Society*.⁶⁹ Though the ‘embedded liberalism’ of the social democratic postwar period contained the market-society contradiction fairly effectively for 30 years,⁷⁰ ongoing financializations and market fundamentalism since the 1980s have reinvigorated the contradictory tension between a utopian and disintegrative *Market Economy* and the self-defensive reaction from *Society*.⁷¹ Corresponding crisis tendencies have since become more and more apparent in issues ranging from housing to world ecology, just as they were in the 1920s-30s.⁷²

The collapse and aftermath of 2008 is merely the most explicit and explosive instance, but it exemplifies quite well the consequences when the contradictions between the convenient fictions of the market and real social life reach critical proportions.⁷³

On the basis of the foregoing analysis, the task ahead for social football seems to be: 1) to grasp the historical relation between economy and society; and then 2) to work out how to put market economy in its place again. In the absence of any paradigmatic shift in the kind of capitalist organization in which we live, it is Polanyi's notion of the *double movement* that therefore provides a framework within the market society for understanding what is happening, as well as some practical guidance on what we are to do about this contradiction and the perpetual crises it engenders.

Over the course of industrialization and the self-destructive proliferation of fictitious commodifications of lived life, a 'deep-seated movement sprang into being to resist the pernicious effects of a market-controlled society'.⁷⁴ The double movement, therefore, refers to the simultaneous 'extension of market organisation in respect to genuine commodities and its restriction in respect to fictitious ones'.⁷⁵ The emphasis in the double movement is therefore upon the protective counter-move forthcoming against the self-destructive mechanism of the market economy as it attempts to commodify land, labour, and money for market exchange.

Of course the countermovements in the double movement are not compatible with market economy, they are exogenous to it, are indigestible to its logic, and ultimately threaten the autonomous operation that is essential to its very definition.⁷⁶ Though liberal ideologists exhort us to conform to the 'real world' of the Market, it is actually society that provides the real and anchored world of sensuous human existence, cultural belonging, the experience of lived life, and the Market that is the utopian and limitless construct of abstract scales and impersonal relations.⁷⁷ This is why and how the market can never be *self-regulating*. We are then left with a proper contradiction, but one in which we must live, struggle, and renegotiate terms through the double movement.

There is a great plurality in how the double movement is manifested in social and political countermovements. Historically, the uprisings of Highland crofters, the founding of central banks, resistances to enclosure, the various phases of factory legislation, the rise of an organized labour movement, the rural 'allocation system' of poverty relief, the struggles of counter-colonial movements, the New Deal of the 1930s, the formation of cartels, the postwar creation of the NHS, and even the emergence of the fascist state, are all examples large and small of countermovements that came into being heterogeneously as part of the double movement in Market Society. Through the 19th century, the various restrictions that countermovements have placed on *laissez-faire* began in a spontaneous way,⁷⁸ but coalesced into various forms through struggle and the contingent politics of organization. The notable heterogeneity in the form of the countermovements of the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as in their points of intervention into the operation of the market economy,⁷⁹ ought to give us confidence and inspiration for how we identify countermovements in the context of contradictions and crises that are idiomatic to advanced capitalism.⁸⁰ Countermovements can arise in unexpected quarters, enlisting unanticipated vocabularies, and can be synthesized in surprising ways with other movements. Countermovements draw heterogeneously upon all manner of legitimizing touchstones and paradigms, from nation or religion to *nimby-ism* or workplace solidarity, just so long as those touchstones lie outside of economic rationality. This of course explains why it is entirely unsurprising that utopian liberals condemn such movements as irrational or regressive, as for example when people refer to tradition, nation, or community in their resistance to fictitious commodifications. It is also why we should not automatically follow such condemnation, when countermovements in football enlist unfashionable categories in resistance to the disintegrative and alienating effect of the dis-embedding market economy.

Of course, behind these spontaneous and varied countermovements lies the prospective role of the *state*. Whilst Polanyi recognized the role of the state in the establishment of market economy,⁸¹ he also pointed to its necessary role in orchestrating and coordinating the double movement. Throughout the history of the Great Transformation, the schizophrenic capitalist state has involved itself in the regulation of the market economy that it itself has emplaced, whether it be bourgeois

factory reform of the 1830s-40s or the social democratic founding of the postwar welfare state. The countermovement therefore has two aspects. On the one hand, the spontaneous reaction of socio-cultural formations in a countermovement to the market economy, and, on the other, the intervention of the state on the basis of those countermovements. A properly regulated institutional framework, backed up by a proper recognition amongst the public as to why that regulation is necessary, with the state as its vehicle, could have the potency to defer, contain, or resolve for a time the contradictions in contemporary football to which I have drawn attention in the preceding pages. The necessity for state intervention through legislative and institutional reform is already advocated by critics like Gary Neville, Ian Wright, and others.⁸²

The aim here has been less to explore various regulatory options as a contribution to the formation of policy, but to provide an analysis as to *why* regulation of whatever kind is necessary. Firstly, there are many who implicitly reject, or even explicitly deny, that regulation is either necessary or preferable. As we have seen, such a reaction is not confined to those with an interest in the status quo, who are obviously not likely to accept the reform agenda, but also to a much broader swathe of the general public that is enthralled to the ideological assumptions of market fundamentalism. It is this latter group that need convincing through an alternative idiom of diagnostic analysis, if any subsequent policy prescriptions or reform packages are to be successfully received and supported. Secondly, I have tried to show that regulatory reform is not merely preferable to inaction, for various political reasons, but how the forces pushing towards regulation are in fact inexorable. Something *is* going to happen, so it would be better to acknowledge it and shape the form and direction of the inevitable reaction from social football through a proper regulation and reform agenda. The point of the article has therefore been to explain and demonstrate what it is that makes a social reaction to the trajectory of liberal football inevitable, so that a better understanding can contribute to a more self-aware, sensitive, and articulate reformatory trajectory (policies, etc.). If some kind of countermovement is going to happen, then analytical contributions must be made to sway, guide, direct, and channel the discourses out of which the social reaction to corporate football will come. This is why I am less concerned here with the content of regulation and more interested in framing the problem, in clarifying what has brought us to this place (ESL debacle), in expressing what is happening right now, and in countering the predictable ideological resistance that is emanating from corporate football via its apologists and beneficiaries.

Having said this, we can give over a few words to what this reform agenda might look like. One direction is offered by the *Guardian's* Tim Lewis, who asks whether the attempted coup and its fallout could be 'the catalyst for fans wrenching back some of the control they have lost in recent years', instead of 'entrenching power and wealth in the hands of a select few' as was intended.⁸³ The most effective potential agenda of reform and regulation seems therefore to strike directly at the structure of club ownership in England, which has to be the single most ambitious programme for a countermovement from social football, but which offers perhaps the most promising core around which heterogeneity in the football countermovement can cohere. Indeed, the furore unleashed over Roman Abramovich's ownership of Chelsea in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine seems to be stimulating precisely this agenda.⁸⁴ The most strident version of this reform suggests the FA emulate the German Bundesliga formula for club ownership rules – the so-called *50 + 1 Rule* – according to which the shares of every club in the Football League would have to be 51% owned by the supporter organizations of that club.⁸⁵ A petition submitted by one Angus Yule on April 21st (2021) has already broken the 100,000 signatory requirement for debate in Parliament (106,837 as of June 11th, 2021), and the wording of the petition illustrates succinctly how the greed-thesis can be easily and productively integrated into my own argument offered here.

The new 'European super league' plans show the clear greed of elite football club owners in England. This precedent of profit over people is already taking the game away from everyday people who founded and made the sport what it is. This law would ensure decisions made around the clubs would take the fans and good of the game as a priority over money.⁸⁶

Tim Lewis feels that ‘adopting the German “50 + 1 rule” would require unprecedented governmental intervention’,⁸⁷ but then the same was true of the NHS, universal suffrage, or even the *Ten Hours Act* of 1847. Given the two contradictions highlighted in this article – *monopoly/competition* and *market/society* – the reform of ownership increasingly looks like a necessary condition for the re-embedding of football into the social sphere, but in a way that can also moderate or hinder the accumulation tendencies towards monopoly in inter-capitalist competition.

Conclusion

In a capitalist context, my call for regulation therefore has a clear rationale. Either a boundless market will disintegrate social football or the uncoordinated and spontaneous reaction from society will kill the development of the game. Only properly formulated and democratic regulatory intervention from the state can emplace a workable *modus vivendi* between corporate and social football in the context of market society that will save both from each other and themselves.⁸⁸

However, the containment of contradiction offered by state regulation is deferral, not resolution, of the contradiction between *Market Economy* and *Society*, and so a constantly critical disposition is required. Whilst state-sponsored reform is a necessary element of the double movement, the double movement itself relies on something more profound than mere legislative and administrative reform, in order to energize, inspire, and sustain resistance to the capitalist state’s sponsorship of market economy. Remembering that countermovement in the double movement must come from without the economic rationality (*extra commercium*), countermovements must find and innovate appropriate concepts and vocabulary from without that space to sustain themselves. Beyond the regulatory agenda, a more radical change in attitude, ideology, vocabulary, concepts is called for. In effect, a way of thinking and talking about football is exigent that takes us beyond the kind of market fundamentalist business-speak discredited in the events of 2007–2008, when much of it was exposed as either empty rhetoric or dangerously out of touch with material realities.

Notes

1. *The Super League*, ‘Leading European Football Clubs Announce New Super League Competition’.
2. Athletic, ‘Woodward and Agnelli are “Snakes” and “Liars”’.
3. See *Monday Night Football*, ‘Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher on European Super League plans’; *Match Of The Day*, ‘Absolutely Disgusting, Bang Out of Order’; Neville, ‘Gary Neville’s Damning Verdict on European Super League Plans’; Neville, ‘Reacting to Man City’s Cup Win and the Big Six’s Future After ESL Collapse’; *Premier League Live*, ‘I Don’t Know How They’ll Recover From This’; *Kelly & Wrighty Show*, ‘Ian Wright Reacts to European Super League’; *Super Sunday*, ‘I’m absolutely DISGUSTED!’; Lewis, ‘The Week English Football Fans Bit Back Against the Billionaire Owners’.
4. Gary Neville on *Monday Night Football*, ‘Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher on European Super League plans’.
5. Scott Collier on *West Ham Fan TV*, ‘Friday Night Pint’.
6. The same point has been made by Hess, ‘How Capitalism Changed Football for the Worse.’
7. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*; Baran and Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital*; Foster, *The Theory of Monopoly Capitalism*; Sweezy, *Four Lectures on Marxism*; Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.
8. Braudel, *Afterthoughts*, 39–47.
9. Jamie Carragher on *Monday Night Football*, ‘Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher on European Super League plans’; Micah Richards on *Super Sunday*, ‘I’m absolutely DISGUSTED!’; Robbie Lyle on *All Gunz Blazing Podcast*, ‘Too Late For Apologies, KROENKE OUT!!!’; *All Gunz Blazing Podcast*, ‘I Don’t Recognise Arsenal Anymore!’; Tim Sherwood on *Kelly & Wrighty Show*, ‘Ian Wright Reacts to European Super League’.
10. *Accumulate, accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets!* – Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 742; see also Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism*, 13–14.
11. Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, 927.
12. Marx, *Grundrisse*; Harvey, *Limits to Capital*; Varoufakis, *Global Minotaur*.
13. Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital*; Harvey, *The Enigma of Capital*; Harvey, *Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism*; Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism*; Mandel, *Late Capitalism*.
14. Sweezy, *Four Lectures on Marxism*, 65.
15. Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, 229–230.

16. By tendency, I mean something closer to what Marx and contemporaries understood by 'laws' (i.e. the law of inter-capitalist competition), which ought not to be interpreted in the way it subsequently has been by positivists, but as a 'tendential law' that never actually has to materialize (Baran, 1986: 13), but is rather a motion towards.
17. Sweezy, *Four Lectures on Marxism*, 37.
18. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*, 6.
19. Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 777.
20. Hess, 'How Capitalism Changed Football for the Worse.'
21. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 73.
22. Cangiani, 'Karl Polanyi's Institutional Theory', 192; Gräser, 'Historicizing Karl Polanyi'.
23. Mészáros, *Beyond Capital*, 81.
24. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844', 70.
25. *Monday Night Football*, 'Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher on European Super League plans'.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. Hess, 'How Capitalism Changed Football for the Worse.'
29. DT on *All Gunz Blazing Podcast*, 'Too Late For Apologies, KROENKE OUT!!!!'; John Barnes on *TalkSPORT*, "'FANS DID NOT WIN!' John Barnes Insists Football Fans Had NOTHING to Do With Super League Collapse'; Wilson, 'ESL Plotters Overlooked Paradox that "Global Fans" Like Football as it is'; Hess, 'How Capitalism Changed Football for the Worse.'
30. This remark I owe to a reviewer at *Soccer & Society*.
31. Cadger, 'A Game of European Monopoly'; Wilson, 'ESL Plotters Overlooked Paradox that "Global Fans" Like Football as it is'; DT on *All Gunz Blazing Podcast*, 'Too Late For Apologies, KROENKE OUT!!!!'.
32. Wilson, 'ESL Plotters Overlooked Paradox that "Global Fans" Like Football as it is'.
33. This of course is generally mystified and usually projected as the contribution of capital itself: 'The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital, as opposed to labour, and hence appears as an attribute of capital' (Marx, 1993b: 694). This point is vital, and it is essential to grasp how value is produced from the surrounding social sphere of football, rather than from the owners of the richest clubs from whom value supposedly 'trickles down'.
34. This is not dissimilar to the way in which Google is valorized by the millions of people who constitute and reconstitute it each day merely by their active contributions to it and passive interactions with it. For an elaboration of how this works, see Marx (1993b: Notebook VII), Virno (1996), Vercellone (2007), Pasquinelli (2019), and Negri (1992, 2018), on the 'general intellect'.
35. One must remember that 'what creates the capital-relation can be nothing other than the process which divorces the worker from the ownership of the conditions of his own labour' – Marx, *Capital: Volume I*, 874.
36. Block, 'Karl Polanyi and the Writing of *The Great Transformation*'; Frerichs, 'Karl Polanyi and the Law of Market Society'; Cangiani, 'Karl Polanyi's Institutional Theory', 178.
37. Gräser, 'Historicizing Karl Polanyi', 130.
38. Carr, *Twenty Years' Crisis*.
39. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 31.
40. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
41. *Ibid.*, 45.
42. *Ibid.*, 43–44.
43. *Ibid.*, 44.
44. *Ibid.*, 148, 157, 220; Silver and Arrighi, 'Polanyi's "Double Movement"', 326; Braudel, *Afterthoughts*, 39–47.
45. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 59.
46. Machado, 'Karl Polanyi and the New Economic Sociology', 121.
47. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 48.
48. *Ibid.*, 49–50.
49. In his sociology, Ferdinand Tönnies' opposed *Gesellschaft* (Civil Society) to *Gemeinschaft* (Community) (Tönnies, 2001 [1887]).
50. See also Block, 'Karl Polanyi and the Writing of *The Great Transformation*'. Polanyi's words are worth some reflection: 'Nowhere has liberal philosophy failed so conspicuously as in its understanding of the problem of change. Fired by an emotional faith in spontaneity, the common-sense attitude toward change was discarded in favor of a mystical readiness to accept the social consequences of economic improvement, whatever they might be' (Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 35).
51. See also Durkheim, *Division of Labour in Society*; Block, 'Karl Polanyi and the Writing of *The Great Transformation*'.
52. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 145.
53. *Ibid.*, 35.
54. Marx, 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844'; see also Moore, 2015).

55. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 71–80.
56. *Ibid.*, 167.
57. *Ibid.*, 36.
58. See Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*.
59. Block, 'Introduction', xxv.
60. *MOTD*, 'Absolutely Disgusting, Bang Out of Order'.
61. Wilson, 'ESL Plotters Overlooked Paradox that "Global Fans" Like Football as it is'.
62. Marx, *Capital: Volume III*, 199.
63. Karakilic, 'Rentierism and the Commons', 4; De Angelis, 'Marx and Primitive Accumulation'; De Angelis, 'Does Capital Need a Commons Fix?'; Hardt, 'The Common in Communism'; Nonini, 'The Global Idea of the "Common"'.
64. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 164.
65. *Ibid.*, 164.
66. *Ibid.*, 44.
67. Thomasberger and Brie, 'Karl Polanyi's Search for Freedom in a Complex Society', 176–177.
68. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 201.
69. Polanyi Levitt, 'On Transformations'.
70. Ruggie, 'International Regimes, Transactions, and Change'; Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 10–11.
71. Block and Somers, *The Power of Market Fundamentalism*.
72. Aulenbacher, Bärnthaler, and Novy, 'Karl Polanyi, The Great Transformation, and Contemporary Capitalism'; Markantonatou, "'Conservative 1920s" and Conservative 2010s?'; Varoufakis, *Global Minotaur*.
73. Fraser, 'A Triple Movement?'
74. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 80.
75. *Ibid.*, 79.
76. *Ibid.*, 136.
77. *Ibid.*, 89.
78. *Ibid.*, 147.
79. Thomasberger and Brie, 'Karl Polanyi's Search for Freedom in a Complex Society', 177; Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 152.
80. Jessop and Sum, 'Polanyi', 165–166.
81. Polanyi, *Great Transformation*, 69.
82. Kelly & Wrighty Show, 'Ian Wright Reacts to European Super League'; *Monday Night Football*, 'Gary Neville and Jamie Carragher on European Super League plans'.
83. Lewis, 'The Week English Football Fans Bit Back Against the Billionaire Owners'.
84. Roan, 'Chelsea & Roman Abramovich'.
85. McCambridge, 'What is the 50 + 1 Rule and Could it Work in the Premier League?'
86. Yule, 'Petition: Enforce the "50 + 1"'.
87. See Block, 'Karl Polanyi and the Writing of *The Great Transformation*', 300.
88. *Ibid.*

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