



Impact of Triple Religion on Sport Development and Ethnic Integration in Postcolonial African Societies

Jepkorir Rose Chepyator-Thomson, PhD

ABSTRACT

Outsiders' influence on Africa is massive economically, culturally, socially and religiously, with disruptions retarding various forms of development, largely emanating from colonialism. The purpose of this keynote address is to unravel briefly the disruptions of colonial impact on indigenous sporting activities and extensively explain how triple religion—indigenous, Islam, and Christianity—impacted sporting activities in post-colonial African societies. Essentially, the emphasis is on (a) the nexus between triple religion and sports evident in colonial disruption of rituals and customary practices leading to new ways of understanding during postcolonial times; (b) political and social development across stadia spaces, including evident of political agitation and compromise, and in promotion of unity and economic development; (c) observations of triple religion in action evident in religious actions implicated in sport practices and competitions.

INTRODUCTION

Outsiders' influence on Africa is massive economically, culturally, socially and religiously, with disruptions retarding various forms of development, largely emanating from colonialism. The disruptions that occurred during colonialism impacted not only Africa's economic and social development but also immensely generated a lot of commotion that negatively affected ways of lives for diverse groups of people across the continent. These included the ways African people played and engaged in sports competitions and worship. The purpose of this keynote address is to unravel briefly the disruptions of colonial impact on indigenous sporting activities and extensively explain how triple religion –indigenous, Islam, and Christianity–impacted sporting activities in post-colonial African societies. Essentially, the emphasis is on (a) the nexus between triple religion and sport: colonial disruption of rituals and customary practices leading to new ways of understanding during postcolonial times; (b) political and social development across stadia spaces: political agitation and compromise, and promotion of unity and economic development and (c) observations of triple religion in action evident in religious actions implicated in sport practices and competitions.

COLONIAL DISRUPTIONS AND IMPACT ON INDIGENOUS SPORT ACTIVITIES

Disruptions that impacted the livelihood of Africans include economic viability, and social and cultural discourses encoded in cultural activities that unified societies, and physicality in movement forms involved in food production and indigenous worship, often happening within the spaces identified as sacred. Of critical importance to this keynote address is how cultural sporting activities and triple religion intersected in spaces that resulted in the changing of African lives. For this, we turn to western schooling introduced to Africa during the colonial period, where all things foreign were promoted and practiced albeit with indigenous resistance.

Indigenous sport activities were impacted negatively during the colonial period, with schools serving as instruments of change. Sport for the masses was introduced through the school system; the European sports—cricket, football, rugby, netball and athletics— were taught to the youth and children and elite sports were taught and promoted through high class school system and private sport clubs that dotted the continent. As Byron (2014) explained, schools became instruments of the integration of sports and education and “Catholic missionary schools’ ecclesiastical mission... found in sports the underlying values... of sports as a thread.... that weaved the moral, educational, physical...[belief systems] that is, the holistic education that the Africans children needed” (p. 80). The missionaries used sports for what they conceived as civilizing and serving as an educational tool for the African children, identifying the potential of sports as a mechanism to recruit participants for mission schools (Darby, 2002). Hence

in post-colonial Africa, indigenous sport activities rarely commanded a center change but introduced sports have had their presence felt across rural and urban environments across the continent, taking precedence over indigenous games and sports (Chepyator-Thomson, 2014).

However, resistance to colonialism happened through sports, particularly wrestling, which is evident in postcolonial Africa. For instance, in the contemporary sporting scene in urban Africa, wrestling has come to “symbolize a moral, performative space for the disenfranchised urban youth as well as an attempt to market an indigenous sporting tradition from the past in the cultural identity” (Carotenu-to, 2013, p. 1890), with indigenous religion totally inculcated into the sport. The practice of Juju in West Africa, based on luck or chance, is performed to “supplement physical talents, techniques and skills -considered necessary to win to (Juju is believed to increase the person’s spiritual’s power. Apert, 2015, P.76), providing explanations that are in keeping with the moral values of African traditional religions. This is where triple religion is incorporated into the sport of wrestling. In Senegal, wrestling matches are held at the end of harvest season and the followers of Diola religion “wear various kinds of roots around waists, arms and legs or shells consecrated soil from the altar area of a spirit shrine around the arms” (Baum, 2017, p. 421), helping to play a crucial role in the shaping of young people’s identities... [and with] religious rituals addressing the spiritual questions raised by athletic competitions” (Baum, 2017, p. 419). Some sports persons use “the Quran to enhance their performance,” others—like the Diola Catholics—use “medals or crucifixes to offer similar protection” (Baum, 2017, p. 421).

IMPACT OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY ON SPORT IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

Post-colonial African societies comprise diverse population of different religions: Islam, Christian, and indigenous, consisting of 40%, 46%, and 12%, respectively, with others making up 2% (Moller, 2006). During this period, a variety of introduced sport activities have come to be the mainstay of the sports industry, albeit with inculcations of Islamic, Christian and religious practices, becoming centrally practiced in mission schools. African children and youth were taught with the image of a foreign God, with muscular Christianity being used as the instrument to bring about a healthy and moral citizenry, and games and sports were interwoven into part of everyday life in schools (Moller, 2006; Alegi, 2008; Ssekamwa, & Lugumba, 2001).

In a post-colonial society, an example being Kenya, 70% Christians, 38% Protestants, 28% Catholics, 25% indigenous and 6% Muslim make up the population, and sports feature prominently in mission schools, particularly in the boarding schools. The famous Christian schools in Kenya—Catholic and Protestant—are St. Patrick’s High School and Sing’ore and Kapkenda and Kapsabet located in the Rift Valley, among others found across Kenya. On St. Patrick’s High School, a BBC.com writer states: “It has a reputation for academic success, sporting achievement and the discipline of the students” (<https://www.bbc.com/sport/5079586>), with Sing’ore Girls Secondary School being considered “the breeding ground for Kenya’s leading women athletes” (Joseph Ngunjiri, 2002: <https://allafrica.com/stories/200204260589.html>). Kapkenda and Kapsabet schools have also produced star athletes who went on to do very well in the world of athletics.

The advent of colonialism started forms of globalization that have come to characterize post-colonial Africa, and nowhere is it more apparent than in sport as implicated in religious practices, particularly Islam and Christianity. According to Giulianiotti & Robertson, 2004, global sports participation “constitutes one of the most dynamic, sociologically illuminating domains of globalization” (p. 545) and its interconnectedness with religion has become defining characteristic of contemporary times. Sports like religion are cultural institutions; each has its followers, and both are entangled in cultural aspects of life in a post-colonial society. Athletes “acknowledge their respective gods in victory and in the invocation of a higher power on the playing fields, signaling their respect for divine intervention in athletic outcomes” (Magdalinski & Chandler, 2002, p. 1).

Advent of colonialism also started religiosity of sport spaces, making stadia the theaters for show-down of different religions and politics happening in concert with racial and gender discourse. For instance, the question of apartheid in South Africa, where racial progress was monitored through control of stadia functions and operations with the sport of rugby serving as medium of change. Sports help to restore human dignity by destroying discriminatory practices. Sports serve as an effective mechanism to bring down negative racial and ethnic differentiation that hampers human progress (Byline: Rev.Dr. Moses Iloh, 2010, April 22, allafrica.com). In South Africa, people of Islamic faith used rugby to help them develop or consolidate their religion and cultural identity (Edward, 1973). Ethnic and religious formations in post-colonial North Africa happened through the stadia and mosques. These formations actualized through Islamic religion and the sport of soccer which featured conflicts, with the state gov-

ernment exerting domination and looking for ways to bring each other together, using ideas on national identity (Magdalinski & Chandler, 2002; Silverstein, 2002).

GLOBALIZATION, RELIGION, AND SPORT

In post-colonial African societies, there has been a mass exodus of athletes/players out of the continent mostly because of meager salaries, and inadequate training and facilities. Also, skilled football players leave the continent due to a lack of organized professional leagues, with many of them ending up in Europe, playing in professional teams and many of them end up practicing according to their chosen faith. For example, for a Cameroonian defender, Collins Fai, on his move to Europe, his Christian faith is still the most important thing in his life (Fai, 2018). African footballers are making their presence felt at the World and IFA World Cup Championships and Olympics, and so are other players and athletes who transverse the globe to ply their trade-skills (Chepyator-Thomson, 2014) with their religious practices still intact.

CONCLUSION

Which way Africa? Begs the question of our indigenous belief systems and interaction with European ideology as crafted cleverly through imported religions. The intermingling of introduced religions with indigenous ones makes for what can be termed: Triple religion. Its impact of Africa's people is enormous; from the dress code, to ways we worship and conduct and run sport practices and competition. One thing is clear, belief systems:

- Are transitional no matter the culture or domination;
- They change with the times, with generations, with ethnic affiliations;
- They are circular not linear;
- They inform identity formation, and impact lived experiences, whether sport practices or church services.

In the end, sports like religion are cultural institutions, with followers, and is entangled in political, social and cultural aspects life in post-colonial Africa, impacting all, young and old. Africa's diverse populace needs to look inwards to find ways of being that are consistent with indigenusness and not look to European religious practices to guide their identity formations in sports

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