Kyle D. AuBuchon

Dr. Yuxuf Abana

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Unit 1

1

The term “The Whiteman’s Burden” has a long history in the justification during the period of European and American colonization. “The Whiteman’s Burden” represents the idea that the white race has a responsibility, and even a moral obligation, to spread culture and civilization to other parts of the world, most notably nonwhite parts of the world such as Africa and India, to uplift and encourage the indigenous population through colonization. Often this came at a price of destroying the local culture and customs to ensure that there would be a full integration of a class hierarchy engineered by the colonist.

Alegi points this out that colonial football often involved the domination and exclusion of African football. White British colonizers in the Congo the white teams enjoyed superior facilities built off the local economy, but the local subagents did not have access to such services (Alegi 4). The French’s “Whiteman’s Burden” came in the form of compulsory physical education. As Alegi states this even inspired Belgian authorities in Leopoldville and Elisabethville to incorporate football into the schools as a way “to provide civilized black youth with healthy distractions to complete their physical and moral education at the school of discipline and endurance that the practice of sport entails.” (Alegi 5). There is a clear indication that the Belgian colonies believed there was a need to provide a form of physical in moral education that was lacking in the indigenous populous. Alegi quotes the Reverend J.E.C Wlldon, headmaster of Harrow a boy’s boarding school, as saying “The pluck, the perseverance, the good temper, the self-control, the discipline, the co-operation, the spirit de corps, which merit success in cricket or football, are the very qualities which win the day in peace or war. In the history of the British Empire, it is written that England has owed her sovereignty to her sports.” (Alegi 8) This further enforces the idea that football was part of England’s culture and was in part due to its success, therefore under the premise of “The Whiteman’s Burden” must be shared with the colonies.

Part of the belief of “The Whiteman’s Burden” was the idea that colonizer would provide cultural uplifting, as well as social and economic. Alegi consistently brings up the idea of “Christian Masculinity” or “muscular Christianity”. This idea arose during the Victorian Protistan era in England and was the idea that physical health was extremely important with Jesus Christ as the model. We see this when Alegi states that British and European colonizers believed football to represent the stylized epitome of a moral order and the metaphoric essence of a cultured civilization. His quoted piece from John Ruther, a missionary in Kabete, is especially poignant. The most important part is “It is our hope in these our games to stiffen the backbone of these our boys by teaching them manliness, good temper, and unselfishness-qualities amongst many others which have done so much to make many a Britisher, and which we hope to instill into our boys in such a way as to make them strong men indeed. Our belief is that our games may be, when properly controlled, a mighty channel through which God can work for uplifting of this race.” (Alegi 12). You see the idea that there is necessity to “uplift this race” and even a fear that these sports need to be properly controlled, an idea you see Alegi explore in chapter two. (568 word count)

2

In chapter two Alegi’s thesis is football began to transition from a something imposed by white colonial powers into something that African’s owned and appreciated. One point he brings up begins with the colonial civil servants that were products of the colonial education structure imposed by colonial powers most notably Britain. Civil workers such as soldiers, interpreters, policemen etc had football imposed as a way of cultural integration into the white society structure, but they inevitably became one of the strongest promulgators of the sport in Africa. While being products of this education they also naturally are influence by their culture and peers. This interesting relationship is highlighted when Alegi posits, based on a quote from African historian Andreas Eckert, that these workers acted as a cultural commuter or broker between the white society and African culture (Alegi 16). Naturally this began the process of the “Africanization” of football. Much like these workers were the product of having one foot in white society and one foot in African society, football in Africa began to have one foot in African culture.

An interesting note that Alegi goes into great depth about is the divisions that make up the different football clubs. There is a large emphasis on the area or neighborhood that you were born in. One such club was the Moonlighters, where it was assumed that sons of the footballers would also join the club. Part of being part of the club was also familial as there was a specific group of families that the club members consisted of (Alegi 18). A trait I would consider “Africanization” is the patriarchal authority that is highlight by Alegi while he is talking about the familial nature of the Moonlighters. The most striking example is players would refer to league officials as “elders” and the patriarchal role of referees. But much like the civil workers, these footballers also began to create the sport in their image

The most striking image the Alegi paints for this transition of the sport is the incorporation of “magic” into football. While you can argue a football club being divided by neighborhood is not unique to Africa, this fusion of agrarian mysticism and football was truly “African”. This also creates a sharp contrast to the “Christian Masculinity” promoted by the colonial education systems with football as the means. There best story Alegi shares is from an interview he had with a former player about a witch doctor coming to smear Vaseline on his shoes to assist with running faster and kicking (Alegi 27). (425 word count)

3.

Nnamidi Azikiwe was Nigeria’s first president and seeming more important, from Alegi’s perspective, founder of a Nigerian fully black controlled sporting club Zik’s Athletic Club or ZAC. Nnamidi Azikiwe’s greatest strength was the ability to use the lessons taught by white colonial powers, and through white colonial powers using football to dominate local culture, against the colonial powers. Much like the existence of the United States Constitution stating, “all men are created equal” and the institution of slavery coexisting presents an impossible moral dilemma, Nnamidi Azikiwe was able to use the ethos instilled from football by white colonizers as a foil to highlight hypocrisy. One of the most interesting points raised by Alegi is that the ideals of the British game were “fair play, courage, physical strength, and self-reliance” (Alegi 38). Being able to develop these ideals seems to counter the idea of “The Whiteman’s Burden” wherein you need a white power structure to actualize dreams of economic and social wealth.

Not only was Nnamidi Azikiwe able to point out the hypocrisy of the ideals and ethics that Britain and other colonizers claimed to stand for, but he was also extremely successful with his football club. This proved to be instrumental in creating a national identity not only in Nigeria but in surrounding countries. Alegi doesn’t go too deep into the initial success of ZAC but states that it is due to Azikiwe’s press empire, which provided the funds as well as the publicity to create facilities and teams leading to the creation of a small stadium in the Lagos suburb of Yuba as well as the Lagos League and the War Memorial Cup championships (Alegi 39). This success as the only major African controlled sports club demonstrated to the continent that African’s possessed the necessary tools for self-reliance and was able to contribute to a national identity in Nigeria.

One of the most important aspects of using football as a tool for opposing the white power structure was the social nature of it. Being part of the national sporting scene allowed Nnamidi Azikiwe to not merely be a member from the intelligentsia pontificating at the masses, but rather a part of the community with grassroots support. A striking excerpt from Alegi comes from Dr. Abdel Halim Mohamed, former president of the Confederation of African Football where he talks about his experience using the football social clubs to raise awareness on independence and the British accused them of being “afendeya” or elitist and bourgeois. Despite this these football clubs created a real support of national identity in African countries as well as a movement for independence. (436 word count)

4.

Off the back of the work of Nnamidi Azikiwe and ZACK football became a central tool in the fight for human rights and the resistance of Apartheid. During WW2 ZAC went on a tour throughout Nigeria. Each stop would draw thousands of spectators where the ZAC team would play and following Azikiwe would criticize the British position of waging a war of “freedom and democracy” while at the same time oppressing Africans and denying the ability of self-governance (Alegi 40).

One of the most striking examples from the book is the Algerian National Liberation front’s “national team”. The Algerian War began in 1954 as a war of independence for French colony Algeria. In 1958, ten Algerian footballers secretly left France through Switzerland and Italy making it back to Algeria. Alegi presents the communique issued on April 15 in the reasoning for the Algerians leaving France, to deny France services of key players, to heighten international awareness of the Algerian fight for independence, to demonstrate that the FLN’s war enjoyed the broad support of the Algerians, at home and abroad (Alegi 44). An excerpt from the book mentioning the how the LA times covered the event allowed me to understand just how impactful this was. The LA times was quoted as saying “It was as if, overnight, the best Latin American baseball players in the major leagues [sic] had fled the U.S and challenged the Yankees and Braves for the world championship.” (Alegi 44).

This politization of football, particularly around the Algerian war, only became more extreme. Showing the problems that existed between not only the elites within the country but also the football teams there was a showdown between the Algerian team Moulodia and the French all white team AS Saint-Eugene where a riot broke out. Violence culminated in an assassination of an Algerian collaborator oa the French Cup final in Paris in May 1957.

Football in the minds of many African leaders was a way of providing equalization. Ferhat Abbas was a chief of the provisional government of Algeria in the late 1950s and was quoted as saying “On a man-to-man basis, on the field of football we can show them who is really superior” (Alegi 47). This is even supported by the ideas of meritocracy espoused by the British during colonization. Football has always been a sport that requires very little in the terms of equipment or money to play. One truly needs only needs one item. These requirements lend itself to mass popularization which allows it to serve in perfectly in the political sphere to popularize and get ideas into the public consciousness. (436 word count)

5.

Peter Alegi, in Chapter Four of *African Soccerscapes*, develops and discusses the evolution and development of organized football in Africa between 1957—1988. Referring to two instances of textual evidence author uses in Chapter Four, assess the significance of these attempts to structure and elevate African football to competitive levels.

Two of the most striking instances of Africa elevating the competitive levels of football on the continent are African countries joining FIFA, the creation of the Africa as one of FIFA’s six geographical zones and the subsequent rise of CAF and other African tournaments. FIFA at the time was an embodiment of a white European centric world view. FIFA is arguably the most internationalized recognized and truly global sport organization and joining this group as newly independent nations gave African countries a parity they could claim. According to Alegi in 1950 the power of FIFA was firmly in the hands of the Europeans (Alegi 64). Despite this the six African nations part of FIFA at the time, Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia and South Africa, were able to successfully lobby the organization at the 1854 FIFA Congress in Bern Switzerland for the recontinuation of Africa as one of the six geographical zones. With being recognized as a geographical zone can the automatic right of a permanent seat on FIFA’s executive committee. Gaining this recognition allowed a near peer status in the football world. Alegi quotes Abdel Halim Mohammed, the Sudanese representee as saying “Argentina kicked against the seats given African and Asia arguing the standard of football in these continents was not good enough” (Alegi 65). This illustrates that even though South America also suffered under the hands of colonialism some were still willing to support oppressive power structures once they had secured a spot. This rise of status was concerning to FIFA’s European members and the white power structure that they had created.

The second instance of elevating the status of African football was the creation of the Confederation africiane de football (Confederation of African football CAF) and the hosting of the inaugural African Nations Cup. This allowed African countries a sense of shared identity, much like the Europeans currently enjoy with the UEFA Cup. CAFs self-stated goals as documented by Alegi was to “organize international tournaments and to advance the interest of Africa in the world of football.” (Alegi 66). Most significant of these tournaments was organizing the African Nations Cup. Using this position of power other African nations demanded that South Africa field a racially integrated team. South Africa refused and consequently were banned from the tournament. This highlights the power of having a prestigious united organization within the continent had. This social and public pressure against apartheid was extremely public and damaging to South Africa’s credibility in the world of football which was often a foil for political issues. (471 word count)

6.

Immigration of African footballers is almost an allegory to the power structure that existed during colonization. Earlier we examined the role of Algerian footballers in France, while not immigration was directly coerced through the colonial might of France. To me the immigration of African footballers represents talent drain out of Africa into wealthy European countries. Despite this talent drain having Africans on a high-profile public stage allow direct influence into the football culture.

A great example of this is Les Raoul Diagne. Raul Diagne’s life is almost a mirror of the colonization era and subsequent winning of independence for French Guyana. He immigrated to France at the age of twenty and quickly proved himself as a capable footballer by winning the French League cup “Double” in 1936 as well as the French Cup in 1939 and 1940 (Alegi 80). More impressively he was the first black player to make the French national team. Unfortunately, France used this image of someone from a colonized territory making it to these heights as a success story for their colonization mission. This was even though black people were still excluded from cycling and rugby which Alegi hypothesizes is due to the French national identity surrounding those two sports (Alegi 81). This attitude shows the racial power structure of only allowing lower status citizens access to lower status sports. Diagne went on to return to Senegal and after it gained independence he became the head coach.

Another high-profile French player was Moroccan born Ben Barek. Barek’s skill in North Africa quickly caught the attention of French scouts where he was drafted to the Olympique Marseilles FC. An interesting figure is the fact that he was paid fifty times more than he earned as a member of the cleaning staff at the Olympique Marseilles gas company, highlighting the disparity in the value places on him as a football player vs a laborer. Barek’s story continues to be one about money and pay where after much success he was paid a transfer fee of 1 million pesetas by Atletico Madrid, at that time the highest transfer fee in the history of Spanish Football (Alegi 82). This showed that in 1940 not only were African footballers reaching the same status, at least on the football stage, as white Europeans there was even instances of them surpassing. Despite these public success Alegis does quote Laurent Dubious a saying even though French fans probably saw Diagne and Ben Barek as French, they probably did not view them as equals (Alegi 82). (421 word count)

Alegi, Peter. *African Soccerscapes*. Ohio University Press, 2010.