



Of Football, Globalization and Cross-Culture, Between Reality and Fantasy in Qatar Episode

Dawood Adesola Hamzah*

Formerly of The Department of Business Law, Faculty of Law, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: Dawood Adesola Hamzah, Formerly Teaching Fellow, SOAS, University of London, London, United Kingdom; Adjunct Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Law, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria.

To Cite This Article: Dawood Adesola H. Of Football, Globalization and Cross-Culture, Between Reality and Fantasy in Qatar Episode. Am J Biomed Sci & Res. 2023 18(4) AJBSR.MS.ID.002512, DOI: [10.34297/AJBSR.2023.18.002512](https://doi.org/10.34297/AJBSR.2023.18.002512)

Received: 📅 January 02, 2023; Published: 📅 May 05, 2023

Introduction

The origin of modern football is traced to the historical narrative of England more than 100 years ago, in 1863 [1]. Other sources suggest that it was first introduced in England as early as 1170 when youths were going to the fields for a 'game of ball' [2]. Another source reveals that aspects of the game can even be traced back to as early as the second and third century BC in China [3]. Be that as it may, the objective at that early age, was to promote sport for healthy living and social and community integration. It was not imagined to be an instrument of cultural globalization. Globalization describes the interconnection of the world in terms of technology, goods, and other services. The world has been dependent on each other since ancient times. However, the wave of globalization in actual terms hit in the 19th century [4]. It has thus opened a new chapter in every facet of human life.

Globalization influences cultures in several ways. It has led to a degree of homogenization process. This is apparent in dress patterns such as the adoption of Western style dresses in shirt and trouser, food consumptions in patterns and styles and of course, sports and community ways of life. The driving forces behind the modern trend of globalization include the International governmental organizations; International non-governmental organizations (NGOs); Businesses, and Migrants. Sports generally and football particularly, is an important tool in the promotion of globalization trends. The general notion, or the on-the-surface understanding, of globalization in terms of sports is connected to the terms like "synergy," cross-culturalism, "international integration arising from the interchange of world views, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture. [5]" In spite of the claim of global cultural integration under the banners of football, the world has

remained in its fractured configuration on account of many factors including, culture affinities and world views. The just concluded Qatar's tournament of the game exemplifies this poser.

Football, Globalization and Culture

Football is the acclaimed most popular sport in the world and its popularity has continued to maintain a skyrocketing status. Globalization has different perspectives and thus, it means many things to many different people. From the socialist perspective for example, globalization is another name for monopoly capitalism or imperialism [6]. Is it contentious to say that football and globalization exemplify the symptoms or elements of the latest phase of capitalism wherein free competition has become a myth, and monopoly is the rule? [7] Generally, culture is the total way of life including economic, political, and social norms, values, and behaviour [8]. Cultural globalization on the other hand, is how the values, ideas, and experiences of a specific culture are transmitted and disseminated across the world. It has significant impacts on international relations and interactions between diverse cultures in the same country [9]. It is seen as the intermixing of people, cultures, economies, and technologies [10], and of course, sports and youth developmental agenda.

Despite its many positive impacts, football is one of the 21st century's most loved and hated sports, bringing communities together and at times, tearing them apart. Analysts and several independent observers feel it promotes sexism, racism, and violence, and sometimes fuels culture of antagonism and even wars. Every four years, the world is sensitized for an event that serves as a showcase of national bravado, superstar gusto and dramatic

coda. Out of all the sports played in the world, there's only one called "the beautiful game" by millions of people [11]. Ordinarily, and on its face-value, football serves as holiday entertainment. People would gather to watch their favourite teams battle it out on the football field. It serves as a temporary driving-wedge between two groups of people. However, the international and local political and economic lifelines that underscore this sport event is mind-boggling and spectacular.

Qatar World Cup: Clash of Civilizations or Cultural Rivalry?

Since its first edition in 1930 in Uruguay, the competition to host the Mondial has been an intensive venture. It was after 92 years that Qatar would be the first Arab country and the first country in the Middle East to host the event [12]. The Qatar world cup edition has introduced several perspectives to the tournament. The perspectives raised questions on whether the event in Qatar a platform for 'Clash of Civilizations' or 'Cultural Rivalry'. Globalization generally is seen as the interconnection of the world in terms of technology, goods, and other services. However, it also serves as a motivation for resurgence of local culture such as revival of traditional ways of life and re-awakening and restoring the societal identity.

It is also apparent in some other important areas of life such as recognition of a worldwide ecological crisis, worldwide concern about health problems, human rights and global democratic values across different cultures, ethnic and religious divides [13]. Football is a global sport with a characteristic of cultural globalization which has long been dominated by Europe, and to a lesser extent, South America [14]. Staging the World Cup in the Middle East was an opportunity for the people in the Gulf and Arab regions to have a tournament which they could attend and not feel foreign [15]. It was a spectacular point that Moroccan and Saudi fans lit up this tournament in a way that simply could not have happened elsewhere. There were significant contingents from Africa and Asia, too [16]. It was an opportunity to showcase the Arab and Islamic cultural heritage to numerous people including the players, the officials, football fans as well as millions of spectators across different cultural and religious backgrounds.

On one hand, FIFA described as the perfect global monopoly -and its crisis as a parable about the future of capitalism" [17], Paul Mason argues that FIFA operates like most monopoly financial institutions. He argues that at the start of what is now being called the era of globalization -an era which is dominated economically by monopoly corporations-"it was assumed that, given time, most countries would become less corrupt and more democratic, because the market can only function under the rule of law [18]". On the other hand, Qatar, prior to the hosting of the FIFA World Cup, was faced with geo-political and social challenges. In 2017 for example, it was accused by some of its powerful Arab neighbors of allegedly

promoting terrorism and extremism. This diplomatic crisis echoed on various international forums, including the UN, which urged the stakeholders to settle the situation through dialogue [19]. However, for the sake of normalization of ties, the neighbouring Arab states presented a list of 13 demands to the government of Qatar. The demands included shutting down Al-Jazeera TV and its affiliate stations, closure of under-constructed Turkish military base and scaling down of bilateral relations with Iran. However, just after a year and a half, Qatar has managed to overcome the crisis successfully [20].

On the social level, there is a very high ratio of men to women in Qatar society; men outnumber women by more than three to one. This is primarily due to the number of expatriate males. It was reported that gender imbalance is a challenge to Qatari society because it perpetuates gender culture and, subsequently, unequal gender rights between men and women [21]. Despite efforts to find a balance between traditional and modern culture, Qatar's old-world values and customs, such as gender-segregated public environments, still exist and are core to national identity [22]. Despite the challenges facing the duo of FIFA and Qatar, they jointly with other stakeholders staged a landmark and historical world cup tournament. The event provided a platform for FIFA to drive its financial aspiration to an unprecedented level in history. The Qatar on the other hand was able to showcase the Arab and Islamic cultures to the world.

It was a confluence of global and local culture with the most splendid images of cultural diversity, harmony, coexistence, and the embodiment of these meanings to the world graphically [23]. For example, all Qatar stadiums reflect the local Arab culture and Islamic civilization. Al-Bayt Stadium, where the opening ceremony and the opening match [24] took place, was built in the form of a huge tent to cover it entirely. The stadium derived its name from the tent inhabited by the people of the desert in Qatar and the Gulf region throughout history [25]. Al-Janoub Stadium, located in the city of Al-Wakra was designed from the sails of traditional Qatari boats to celebrate the ancient history of Al-Wakra city, as a center for hunting and searching for pearls in the past [26]. Guests were able to see the Mosques and their fluttering springs and hear the call to prayer in the country, day and night as an opportunity to visit cultural centres that introduce Islam to anyone who wants to embrace it. Several forums were created to share information and knowledge with visitors about the local culture and set guidelines for this, including the dress code that conforms with the local culture and religious dictates [27].

The 'Katara Cultural Village' Mosque in Doha, the capital city also served as a centre for attracting non-Muslims to Islam [28]. Qatar's Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs has erected a pandal outside the FIFA World Cup stadium, where tourists are also being provided 'knowledge' about Islam. Staff and preachers of the Qatar

Guest Centre have been deployed at the entry gate of the Mosque to promote Islam at the Eid Charity Foundation. It was reported that a Mexican fan converted to Islam in a Mosque in Doha's Cultural Village on the second day of the World Cup 2022 in Qatar [29].

However, the story was not the same for other ideological groups such as the LGBT and Human Rights promoters. It was reported that the Qatari local organisers promised to comply with FIFA rules on promoting tolerance, including LGBT issues. FIFA was assured that, in accordance with its inclusion policy that it would not restrict the display of pro-LGBT imagery and symbols (such as rainbow flags) at matches during the World Cup [30]. But shortly before the commencement of the tournament, a senior security official stated that there were plans to confiscate pride flags from spectators, claiming it to be a safety measure to protect the fans from altercations with spectators that are anti-LGBT. This change in policy was criticised. It was argued that actions against the LGBT community by the state were of a greater concern to those attending the World Cup than the actions of individuals [31].

Protesting the Qatar on LGBT, it was reported that a 'demurring protestant' holding a rainbow flag has sprinted onto the pitch in a World Cup game in Qatar in an apparent objection to the country's homophobic stand [32]. The protester entered the field of play during the group stage game between Portugal and Uruguay. 'He' was chased across the pitch by security guards and was eventually grabbed and taken away. It was noted in the report that being gay is illegal in Qatar and carries the risk of a jail sentence or even being executed, although there are no cases of capital punishment recorded. It was one of several issues that made holding the World Cup in Qatar controversial [33].

Football and Globalization

The economic interest of the powers behind football at national and international levels are steadily protected. The cross-cultural integration targeted by the globalization agenda may not be fully realized as envisaged due to certain factors that are not within the control of its promoters. These are the two points that stand out from the analysis of this paper. The teeming population of players, fans, and football lovers across the globe particularly developing economies, had remained economically marginalized. An analyst observes in this regard that "globalization is the global spread of the economic system of capitalism. Promoted by the ideology of neoliberalism, the goal is a wholly deregulated global market society" [34]. Others argue that sport is "bound up with international corporate power", and nothing of significance takes place beyond the gaze of this power [35]. FIFA is the power in this regard.

It has been reported that Qatar spent \$229 billion on World Cup infrastructure. However, this figure has not been confirmed

by the FIFA [36]. Russia's Tass news agency report shows that the highest total confirmed by a Qatari official was \$200 billion [37]. A comparative breakdown of figure as described by Front Office Sports shows that South Africa reportedly spent \$3.6 billion on the 2010 World Cup, successfully spending less on infrastructure than previous hosts Germany (\$4.3 billion in 2006), and Japan and South Korea (\$7 billion in 2002) [38].

As earlier noted, globalization serves as a motivation for resurgence of local culture such as revival of traditional ways of life and re-awakening and restoring the societal identity. Therefore, no matter how powerful a force to drive the globalization for cultural homogenization, people are always conscious of their culture and are always committed to preserve it. It cannot be imagined that a sovereignty country would bend its rules to accommodate a culture considered to be alien and antithetical and antipodal to theirs. LGBT is considered alien to the Qatar culture and so found it difficult to accommodate. Rather, Qatar preferred and considered it exigent and imperative to promote their Arab and Islamic culture.

Alexander Lynn and Tarkpor Grupee Succinctly Describe the Episode Thus

"The bottom line in the globalization of football is that it is a commodity. The labor of the football players are likewise commodities. There is social progress and internationalism represented in the popularity of football. On the other hand, is the force and power of the profit motive, the motive to extend the reach of the most wealthy few over the vast majority of the people of the world - in this case through culture, sport, football. The tension, the contradiction between these two trends, represents the major social contradiction of our time."

Conclusion

The conclusion that can be drawn from the analysis of this paper is that globalization is not new after all. It is the same age-old phenomenon of imperialism [39]. The adoption of football as an "ambassador of globalization was to realize the goal of this globalized agenda [40]. Despite the tempting and persuasive claim of global integration and "bringing together of nations," "the coming merger into one world," and the cross-cultural successes being ascribed to football as a globalized sport, the world had remained polarized and marked in schism and fractured configuration. It has remained as divided as before by class and nationality [41]. The multi-national, international corporate organizations, the hegemonic powers behind the economic, cultural and political world orders are at the centre of this division which is aptly characterised as 'the social system of monopoly capitalism within which football is flourishing, and it is the era of imperialism for which globalization is the cover story [42]'. Though, culture is dynamic and never static, yet, it is valued and cherished by all civilizations. No effort would be

spared to preserve culture. Except totally incapacitated, no society accepts cultural domination, subjugation, and imperialism either in the classical or contemporary times.

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