BETWEEN LOYALTY AND OPPORTUNITY: AFRICAN ATHLETES, FOREIGN ALLEGIANCE, AND THE POLITICS OF NATIONAL IDENTITY AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper explores the multifaceted impact of African athletes' migration to Europe as well as adoption foreign allegiances on sports development, cultural identity, and national pride within the context of the Global Sporting Diaspora. The primary aim is to unravel the motivations influencing athletes' decisions, assess the dual impact on home countries, and propose strategic recommendations for policymakers.The results show a complex interrelation of economic attraction, cultural identity negotiation and regulatory challenges, as illustrated through in-depth case studies in football, basketball and kickboxing. The difference between salaries in foreign leagues and the average national salaries of the sportsmen's countries may signal potential problems with the sports infrastructure in their countries. The paper adds to the existing body of knowledge by bringing conceptual clarity to the motivations behind dual nationality decisions and enhancing the discourse on the Global Sporting Diaspora beyond football to include diverse sports disciplines. The recommendations highlight the need for strategic investment in grassroots development, strengthening domestic league structures, regulatory reforms, incentivising national representation and creating sustainable economic models to effectively navigate the dual nationality dilemma.Implications for future research include the psychological impact on athletes, the long-term effects on domestic sports infrastructure and the evolving nature of regulatory frameworks in the dynamic global sporting landscape. This paper provides timely insights for scholars, policymakers and sports enthusiasts who seek a nuanced understanding of the

complexities inherent in the intersection of sports, culture and global identities, as well as those who seek to determine the political economy of global sports

Introduction

The global sports arena has seen a growing trend of African athletes switching allegiance to countries outside Africa. This phenomenon is referred to as the Global Sporting Diaspora. The development has far-reaching implications not only for the athletes involved, but for the development of sport, cultural identity and national pride in African states.

The migration of African athletes to compete for other countries is a continuing trend with a history and changing sociocultural, economic and political dynamics. Though the migration of athletes from their home nations in search of opportunities is not a new phenomenon, the present diaspora is unprecedented in its size and implications and demands a nuanced examination.

A good example is the migration of the best African football players to European leagues, which has become a hallmark of the sport, affecting both the players' careers and the development of football in Africa. (Darby & van der Meij, 2018).

Moreover, it is important to look into the historical and socio-economic factors which have caused this phenomenon. Economic inequalities, few opportunities at home and the lure of better training facilities and competition abroad have been important factors. Scholars such as Maguire (2009) and Parker (2015) have produced seminal work that has illuminated the historical development of athlete migration. Such work provides useful insight into the contextual factors that influence this trend.

The economic implications of athlete migration have been studied (Campbell 2010; Darby 2010) and the effects on both the countries of origin and destination were highlighted. Based on this, the thrust of this paper is to analyse the drivers behind the adoption of foreign allegiances by African athletes and how this phenomenon affects sport development in their home countries..Given the changing dynamics of global sports and its nexus with identity and development, this paper is of utmost importance. This paper contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the implications of these migrations not only on the athletes themselves but also on the larger sporting infrastructure and cultural fabric of African countries by fully unpacking the implications of the Global Sporting Diaspora.

Methodology

This is a qualitative study and only qualitative data collection methods are used to investigate the Global Sporting Diaspora. We will employ thematic and narrative analysis to systematically examine recurring themes and individual stories, thereby unpacking the complexities of athlete migration, cultural identity shifts and their impact on sports development. The study is inspired by the established qualitative research approaches proposed by Creswell (2014) and Denzin and Lincoln (2018) to achieve a holistic exploration. The qualitative approach aims to understand the depth and context of the Global Sporting Diaspora and provide nuanced insights into the complex dynamics of athlete migration in African countries.

Evolution of global sporting diaspora: An Overview

To understand the evolution of the global sporting diaspora, and particularly the African football migration, a nuanced view that does not homogenise the continent is needed. It is imperative to recognise the diversity of Africa in its social, cultural, political and economic aspects. Football was introduced to the African colonies in the early 20th century as a recreational activity for the settlers and a means of social control over the local population. But the introduction of domestic leagues and tournaments and the formation of all-African teams thereafter led to an increase in interest, and football became a major cultural phenomenon in Africa.

As the colonial era drew to a close in the 1960s, football not only emerged as a popular leisure activity but also became a crucial platform for expressing nationalist sentiments and fostering political resistance in the region. The historical role of football in Africa mirrors similar patterns observed in other parts of the continent (Alegi, 2010), yet with distinctive colonial ties influencing migration routes and networks. Notably, former colonial powers continue to play a pivotal role in the recruitment of African players, with France, Belgium, and Portugal serving as major receivers of talent. The connection between football migration and colonial history persists, shaping contemporary patterns. While West Africa experiences a significant flux of players to Europe, East Africa remains relatively unaffected by this migration trend (Poli, 2006).

You can still see the direct impact of colonial history in world football today. European clubs heavily tend to recruit from their former territories. That’s why there's such a strong, established pipeline of players moving from West and North Africa straight into French leagues.

Over in the UK, British clubs bring in a lot of talent from former colonies like Ghana and Nigeria. But interestingly, you just don't see that same influx from East Africa, despite the historical ties. It really goes to show that if you want to understand how African talent makes its way into global football, you have to look closely at the specific histories shaping those regions. (İpek, Oylumlu, and Nuhoğlu, 2019).

Contemporary cases of athlete migration, particularly within football, illustrate the expansion of the Global Sporting Diaspora. Prominent African footballers, including Samuel Eto'o and Didier Drogba, have chosen to play in European leagues, underscoring the economic motivations that drive this migration. Ungruhe and Esson (2017) identify lucrative contracts and enhanced living standards as primary factors influencing the migration of African football talent to Europe.

Migration and African Football

Migration within and from the African continent is frequently characterized as a widespread phenomenon in academic, media, and public discourse. Prevailing assumptions tend to generalize the scale of both internal and international migration, often citing high numbers of actual and aspiring migrants (de Bruijn et al., 2001; Hahn and Klute, 2007; Kleist and Thorsen, 2017). However, it is essential to critically examine and contextualize this phenomenon by focusing on the diverse practices and approaches to migration across the continent.

In Western Africa, spatial mobility through internal and cross-border migrations has been a prevalent practice for generations. People move for various reasons, including employment

opportunities, education, adventure, urban lifestyles, and marriage (De Bruijn et al., 2001). Similarly, migration to Europe or North America has been an aspiration and a practice for decades, often driven by the pursuit of a better life due to limited social and economic opportunities in home societies.

Conversely, migration to Europe and the United States has become a social norm, particularly among the young urban generation aspiring for social mobility (Grätz, 2010). This aspiration is driven by the desire to become successful, gain and share resources, and fulfill the demands of a reciprocal intergenerational contract. Despite the uncertainties in actual trajectories, migration to Europe is widely viewed as a pathway to success in today's young urban generation.

This culture of migration extends to football, particularly in Ghana, a major African exporter of football players. Anticipated player trajectories are often associated with careers abroad, influenced by the increasing commercialization and global reach of top European football leagues. Iconic players like Michael Essien or John Obi Mikel serve as role models, inspiring a whole generation of young males in West Africa (Ungruhe, 2016). The belief in the distinct talent, bodily abilities, and skills of West African players perpetuates the motivation for young footballers to pursue international careers, despite the uncertainties and obstacles they may face (Esson, 2015; Ungruhe and Esson, 2017).

While football migration may seem unique, it shares similar desires and aspirations as other forms of migration (Ungruhe and Esson, 2017). The motivation to pursue a career in Europe is driven not only by assumed excessive wealth and celebrity lifestyles but also by the road toward social mobility in home societies.

Transnational Sport Migration

Beyond football, athletics, with its deep roots in African nations, presents another dimension of the diaspora. The migration of Kenyan and Ethiopian long-distance runners seeking opportunities in Europe or North America exemplifies the broader patterns of athlete mobility (İpek, Oylumlu, and Nuhoğlu, 2019). Agergaard et al. (2019) explore the globalization of marathon running, emphasizing how events such as the Diamond League have facilitated greater mobility and visibility for African athletes.

In Kenya, world-class long- and middle-distance runners have fostered a running culture that translates into sport labor migration practices. Unlike football, running benefits from less dependency on public financial resources, allowing poorer nations to compete internationally (Njororai, 2016). However, the growing commodification of running globally poses challenges for Kenya as promising runners are recruited by countries in the Middle East, contributing to a loss for Kenya (Campbell, 2010; Njororai, 2011).

Similarly, in football, the strategy of countries like Qatar to compete at an international level involves running academies in East African countries. This practice aims to scout, train, and select the best individuals to become citizens of Qatar, forming a competitive national team for the upcoming World Cup in 2022(Campbell, 2010; Poli, 2010). While this may establish a (sporting) culture of migration in East Africa, it may also result in the loss of excellent footballers for East African national teams.

This new transnational sport migration, if adopted as a model by other nations, may initially bring more loss than gain for less-

developed football nations in the region.. The political consequences of such an increase in players' hopes of moving to other countries and changing their citizenship, however, might have beneficial effects in the long run. The investments in permanent facilities such as professional academies can improve the local level of sports and generate elite talent for regional national teams to be attractive to European clubs and scouts (Poli et al., 2019).

FIFA's Global Transfer Market Report 2020 also highlights this diaspora. Football's globalisation is mirrored by the fact that the report shows that international transfers for African players have been on the steady rise. Empirical evidence such as this strengthens the conceptualisation of the global sporting diaspora as a real, and expanding, phenomenon in the football world (FIFA, 2020).

Since the Global Sporting Diaspora has developed, there has been an increasing number of researchers who have explored its sociocultural meanings such as Darby and Solberg (2016) and Maguire (2011).

The tension between global success and the preservation of cultural identity is a central theme. The economic gains for individual athletes come at the cost of potential detachment from their cultural roots. The narratives of athletes like Haile Gebrselassie and Caster Semenya illustrate the nuanced challenges and identity shifts associated with the Global Sporting Diaspora (Maguire, 2011).

Rationale Behind Athletes Migration to Europe

This section presents the major drivers behind athletes' migration to Europe at the detriment of their home countries, which is a central aspect of the Global Sporting Diaspora. The drivers are discussed thematically as follows:

Economic Incentives

One of the main reasons that athletes have to move to Europe is economic. Andersson and Pettersson-Lidbom (2018) highlight the lure of high-paying deals, better financial prospects, and better living standards as key motives for African players, particularly in football, to move overseas and join the European leagues. As a result of the economic differences between sports markets in the developed and developing countries, athletes are motivated to find environments where they are able to obtain greater rewards for their skills (Darby and Solberg, 2016).

This is perhaps the example of African footballers trying to find a job in the lucrative European leagues. SadioMané and Mohamed Salah are two key players who left the African leagues to sign with big clubs abroad, such as Liverpool and Leicester, and are representative of the quest for monetary success and international visibility (FIFA, 2021). These migrations are a testament to the intricate dynamics between player mobility and the financial aspects of global sports.

Professional Development and Exposure

In addition to economic factors, professional development and world exposure are major reasons why athletes move to Europe. It is possible that an athlete's potential for optimal training and competition may be compromised by limited resources and infrastructure in some African countries. This means that sports development opportunities are better in more developed sports environments, as they allow players to gain access to better training facilities, training coaches, and exposure to higher quality competition (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson, 2019).

For instance, Kenyan and Ethiopian long-distance runners frequently move to Europe or North America to train under the supervision of top coaches and engage in prestigious marathons around the world (Chepyator-Thomson and Ariyo, 2017). This focus on professional development mirrors the conceptualisation of the movement of athletes around the world as an effective strategy for improving athletes' skill sets and competitiveness.

National Team Representation and Global Recognition

Sometimes athletes do this for different reasons, such as becoming eligible to play in foreign teams and in other countries' national teams where they might have better opportunities for success or publicity.This strategic decision can be made based on the athlete's personal and professional goals.Some examples are athletes changing their country of origin to compete in big games and events, like the Olympic Games or World Championships, where they believe that a competitive country will have more opportunities to win (Cleveland, 2017; Maguire, 2011).Exceptional talents such as Claude Makélélé, who represented France in spite of being born in Kinshasa, DR Congo, are representative of the difficulties faced by home countries when individuals choose to play for foreign teams.The wider implications of this for talent pools, youth development and the visibility of African football on the global stage is also analysed.Born in Mbandaka, DR Congo, José Bosingwa was an important part of FC Porto's success before joining Chelsea.In the same way, Patrice Evra of Dakar, Senegal, decided to play for France, despite the controversies and a player revolt during the 2010 World Cup.Born in Accra, Ghana, Marcel Desailly felt entirely French and, as such, cultural identity was of major importance in such decisions.Studying the factors that affect athletes' choices of countries to represent reveals a complex mix of economic factors, cultural connections, and personal experiences.The example of LuísNani, who made his home from Praia, Cape Verde, to represent Portugal highlights how international success can be very attractive and how to be representing your country is a source of pride (Cleveland, 2017).Likewise, the 41-year-old WilfriedZaha, from Côte d'Ivoire, opted to play for England on the grounds of his career interest and ambition.Born in Kinshasa, DR Congo, for Belgium, Christian Benteke also highlight the challenges athletes have in balancing their individual goals with a national identity.Born in Mampong, Ghana, Gerald Asamoah, the first black African to represent Germany, brings a different flavor to this delicate balance (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson, 2019).There are, however, challenges and shifts in identity along the way to these motivations.When it comes to sports, it is a common occurrence for athletes to experience a conflict between personal achievements and the maintenance of cultural and national identity (Maguire, 2011).When an athlete changes his or her allegiances, the conflict between personal goals and national pride is heightened (Solebo, 2016)

Implications on Sports Development in Home Countries

The consequences of players moving to Europe in search of a new nationality to represent in their own country is a complex issue, involving economic, social and cultural aspects.This section explores the conceptual underpinnings and empirical data, supported by further case studies and practical examples from a range of different countries across Africa, to give a more complete picture of the effect on sports development.

Economic Drain and Resource Diversion

The economic losses and resources that are drawn away from Africa due to athletes moving to more economically prosperous sports markets are echoed throughout the continent.Players such as Ivory Coast's Didier Drogba and Ghana's Michael Essien, who have gone to other clubs in Europe since the mid-2000s, are good examples.The transfer of Drogba to Chelsea in 2004 and Essien to the same club in 2005 reflect not only the financial interest of the clubs but also highlight the resource gaps in their respective countries' domestic leagues (FIFA, 2020; Campbell, 2010).The pay gap is exacerbated by the interest these players have in Europe – and the difference in their wages compared to the average salary in their countries of birth (CIES Football Observatory 2019).In addition to the above, there were the recent transfers of Moroccan international Hakim Ziyech to Ajax from Chelsea in 2019, and the transfer of another Moroccan international to Real Madrid, Karim Benzema, in 2016.This astronomical amount is much higher than Morocco's annual football budget of $240 million, which accounts for a huge economic difference (FIFA, 2020).The money factor often lures young athletes such as Ziyech to look into playing abroad, not only for the money, but for the exposure as well.But in football, there are even more economic challenges.Wayde van Niekerk, the 2016 South African Olympic gold medalist, is a good example of the diversion of resources caused by migration to an international camp for the athletes.The steep expenses that are involved in the provision of elite training facilities further impoverishes local sports budgets, creating a deficit in South Africa's sports infrastructure (Agergaard et al., 2019).The economic differences become even more striking when one compares these athletes' salaries with the national figures of their respective home countries, which are quite low (CIES Football Observatory, 2019).

Developmental Deficiencies and Infrastructure Gaps

Sports development gaps and developmental deficiencies in home countries are further compounded by the influx of sports people into more developed sporting environments.Kenya's long-distance runner EliudKipchoge offers insights into this.EliudKipchoge, a Kenyan long-distance runner, who has moved his training base to Europe since 2015, offers insights.Kipchoge's quest for excellence is commendable, but Kenya is denied the chance to improve the standard of coaching and training in their country, which otherwise would raise the standards of coaching in East Africa, and its developmental lag (Pfister and Röttger, 2011).The disparity between the level of infrastructure and what is needed is not limited to athletics.Think about the 2018 deal for Nigerian football talent Alex Iwobi as he joined Everton from the Arsenal.The relocation to a club that has cutting edge infrastructure and sports science facilities reinforces the differences between the local sports science infrastructure in Nigeria.The developmental inadequacies are also highlighted when one looks at Iwobi's salary in comparison to the average income in Nigeria, which highlights the economic consequences of the migration of athletes (Andersson and Pettersson-Lidbom, 2018).

Impact on Youth Aspirations and Grassroots Engagement

A complex mix of personal dreams and national identity is beautifully illustrated by Ivorian born WilfriedZaha. Zaha's decision to play for his country of birth instead of his country of origin poses an issue of cultural

identity and national pride. The potential disconnection from cultural geography and grassroots sporting cultures of the athletes, such as Zaha, as they ascend to the global stage is symptomatic of the wider conflicts in the political economy of African football migration (Maguire, 2011).

Its conflict between individual success and national pride is very apparent in the stories of the African athletes. In addition to the cases mentioned above, think of the case of Cameroonian footballer Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting, who changed his allegiance to the national team in 2017. The decision, influenced by personal and professional aspirations, underscores the intricate interplay between individual success and national identity (Maguire, 2011). This is not just about the individual athlete, but about the impact on cultural identity and national pride within the wider sporting community and for the nation as a whole.

In addition, discuss the case of South African Olympic athlete Caster Semenya whose case for eligibility sparked discussion about his potential to represent other countries. The prospect of the change, however, is not only related to personal matters, but also to questions of maintaining connections with culture and national identity in the context of the migration of athletes (Maguire, 2011). This is a complex interplay that is compounded when viewed in the context of the national averages of the athletes' countries. These are cases that both illustrate people's choices and point toward a larger influence on national narratives (Darby, 2012).

Cultural Identity and National Pride

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Cultural Identity in the Global Sporting Landscape

Cultural identity in the global sporting context is drawn with a myriad of colliding narratives, that cross borders and cultures. African countries have created a web of sport heroes whose lives and stories are intertwined in the fluid landscapes of cultural identity. A cautionary tale from Senegalese footballer SadioMané comes to mind. Mané's success in European football, particularly with Liverpool since 2016, mirrors the economic dreams of African players looking for success in Europe. Yet, Mané's cultural identity is strong and demonstrated in his philanthropic activities back home in Senegal, where he has lived a life of balance between global success and commitment to his culture (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson, 2019).

RiyadMahrez, an Algerian footballer, joined Leicester City in 2014 for European football and then later joined Manchester City, is a story of economic motives and cultural identities. Mahrez's success in Europe enhances his image at the international level, and thus his cultural reputation as an ambassador of Algeria. As a whole, his journey reminds readers of other athletes who struggle with balancing economic interests with cultural identity in the global sports landscape (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson, 2019).

In the meantime, the rise of transnational sporting identities is represented by a Moroccan footballer, Hakim Ziyech. Ziyech's footballing career at Chelsea in the English Premier League and for the team of his country, Morocco, in international matches illustrates a seamless and transcendent identity within the world of football. The development of multiple cultural affiliations of athletes is a case in point of the fluid nature of identities in a globalized context of sport, because they are athletes who have to function in several different cultural landscapes (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson, 2019).

Media, Economic Success and Cultural Identity Retention

In a globalised context, through media discourses, helps to redefine cultural conceptions and create sporting identities. Wilfred Ndidi's story with Leicester City in the EPL is now a tale of breaking the stereotypes and changing the world's perception of African footballers. Ndidi's achievement is not just a sporting one, but an achievement that helps to represent a positive Nigerian and African identity on the international platform (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson, 2019).

Examining the economic impact of athlete migration on cultural significance unveils the story of Gabonese striker Pierre-EmerickAubameyang. Migrating to Arsenal in 2018 was a financial risk for Aubameyang, but his decision to wear traditional Gabonese culture through his goal celebrations, including the iconic mask, was a deliberate move to keep and display his cultural identity in an international setting. When that economic success is achieved in European football, the expression and pride in it becomes a platform (Poli, Ravenel, and Besson, 2019).

Cultural identity is explored through athletes in the Middle East as demonstrated through Algerian football player, Baghdad Bounedjah. Bounedjah's selection for Al-Sadd, Qatar and his representation for Algeria demonstrates a unique aspect of identity negotiation in an area with a unique cultural context. Bounedjah's sporting path also exemplifies the intricate nature of cultural identity in international sports, highlighting the complexities of cultural influences and the ways in which they shape the sport's history and legacy (FIFA, 2020).

A reflection on the complex nature of culture in the context of world sport reveals a captivating array of stories, strengths and struggles. The stories of Mané, Mahrez, Ziyech, Ndidi, Aubameyang and Bounedjah offer a prism through which to explore the complex intersections of culture, economy, and world story. The narratives of sport players who travel and compete in the global sphere become a forceful representation of the changing face of cultural identity in the 21st century.

The Dilemma: Choosing Foreign Allegiances

African athletes' foreign allegiances are an interesting and complex dilemma which extends beyond the sporting arena, to encompass the economic aspirations, the complex negotiations over identity and the individual success and national pride.

The link between identity and opportunity is very illustrative, for example with Moroccan-born AchrafHakimi. Hakimi's decision to play for Morocco abroad and build a career in European football is a testament to the fine line that athletes navigate between maintaining their cultural identity and seizing opportunities in the wider world. Athletes' stories of negotiating identity in the global sporting arena - as Hakimi's narrative does so (Grätz, 2010) - are present in many other sports. Another notable instance is of the case of Nigeria-born Alex Iwobi, who decided to represent Nigeria in international football rather than England. Iwobi's decision underscores the intricate dynamics involved in the dual nationality dilemma, balancing personal aspirations with a sense of cultural and national allegiance (Poli, 2016).

In the Nigerian football scenario, there are instances of dual citizenships, where the player may have to make a choice between their country of origin and adopted nation. Football identity is a very transnational subject, as seen in the example of England-born Nigerian international striker BukayoSaka, who played for Nigeria. The decision makes for discussion of factors that affect an athlete's choice, for example, familial bonds and the desire to achieve success on an international level (FIFA, 2020). The other notable example would be GiannisAntetokounmpo, a Nigerian-born basketball player who has decided to represent Greece in international games. As Antetokounmpo's NBA success raises Greece's international profile, the economic realities play out as well.

Nigerian athletes, especially those in the football game, are regularly presented with the option of playing for a country that has a better sports development system. The complexities and choices of athletes who have dual citizenship are vividly captured by players such as Nigerian-born Victor Moses, who played for the English national team, and Ola Aina, who represented Nigeria, but was also eligible for England.

Economic incentives also have an important influence on the formation of identity choices, as is the case with Kevin-Prince Boateng, who was born in Ghana but brought up in Germany. When Boateng chose to play for Ghana internationally, his path has taken him to European sides like Barcelona and AC Milan. Dual citizenship is also influenced by the economic attraction that football offers, and the financial opportunities that can be found in Europe.

The financial aspect of the problem is further highlighted by breaking down the financial factors and wages. When looking at the comparison of the wage of sports stars from

other countries to their country's average pay, one can see a complicated picture. When Nigerian footballers such as Victor Moses sign for Europe, they tend to earn much more than the national average in Nigeria.

From a South African perspective, Percy Tau's journey from playing in the South African Premier Soccer League to pursuing opportunities in Europe showcases the intricate decisions athletes face. Tau's choice to join Belgian club Club Brugge, where he played before moving to English side Brighton and Hove Albion, emphasizes the global dimensions of identity choices and the pursuit of success on international stages (Poli, 2006).

Implication for African Nations and Continental Sport Development

The complex situation of athletes taking up foreign citizenships raises a number of difficult choices for African countries, which go beyond sporting matters. This section explores in detail the various aspects of these trade-offs, covering economic, cultural and developmental issues, and delving into empirical examples.

Economic Gains and Developmental Dilemmas:

African players' transfer to other leagues can be a factor of significant economic benefits, such as high-paying contracts, sponsorships, and international recognition. But there's a developmental problem for the home nations with this economic bonus. The Nigerian footballer, Victor Moses, who transferred to Europe's leagues, is an example of this trade off. While the Nigerian football system changed marginally due to individual success, Moses' achievements in other countries made him a poster boy who raised his financial status to a high level, thus raising the challenge of how much individual success can translate into systemic development.

Inadequate management of sports in Nigeria as reported by Okunbor and Aibueku (2007) may be traced to financial constraints. Lack of financial resources for development and maintenance of sports and physical activity facilities, which hinders effective administration of sports programs. Okunbor and Aibueku (2007) highlight the negative impact of the lack of funding for sports federations or forcing them to find the funding themselves to organise sports activities.

The government is now the source of a large share of sports funding in Nigeria (Mohammed, 2005) accounting for nearly 90 per cent of funding. But Mohammed argues that perpetuating this dependence on government subsidies is not possible if Nigeria wants to be great in sports. Mohammed believes that additional funding sources need to be tapped into and taken into consideration for achieving this desired ideal in sports, in order to ensure a holistic implementation of sports programmes. This is the need of the hour if Nigeria must progress in the development of sports.

Cultural Dilution and Global Representation:

The question of representation and cultural identity is a delicate one that African countries face when sending athletes on the international stage (Lembo, 2011). This is reflected in the transfer of Senegalese star footballer SadioMané to European football. Mané's international success boosts Senegal's international presence and enhances positive global images of Senegalese talent. But it is possible to create cultural dilution as athletes grapple with the characteristics of foreign leagues and cultural environments, with questions concerning the

retention of cultural heritage in the context of its global recognition (FIFA, 2021).

Brain Drain and Sporting Diaspora:

The idea of "brain drain" is reimagined in the context of the sporting diaspora, in which talented athletes participate in the cultural and economic capital of foreign countries. This is the two-fold story of Algerian football star RiyadMahrez, who moved into the European leagues. Mahrez's achievements in Europe not only improve Algeria's international profile, but they also represent a version of "athletic brain drain"—in that the country's representatives are helping to bolster the success of other nations' leagues, instead of supporting the development of its own sport. (Darby, 2012)

Striking a Balance between Institutional and Individual Success

Balancing institutional sports development and individual success in the global arena is a challenge to African countries. The NBA-Nigerian dichotomy was exemplified by the importation of Nigerian basketball player, GiannisAntetokounmpo. By achieving success in the NBA, Antetokounmpo raises his public profile and the international recognition of the game's African talent. The overall implication of this individual achievement, however, is that it is not a systemic change in the Nigerian basketball ecosystem, and thus a broader sports development strategy is needed (Amara and Nauright, 2018).

National Pride and Economic Realities:

The competition for national pride and athletes representing their nation on the international stage clashes with the economic realities which push athletes to play in other leagues. This is the story of Ethiopian-born Dutch distance runner Sifan Hassan. The success of a sportsperson like Hassan enhances the pride of the nation, but the financial benefits and facilities offered by European countries start becoming appealing options when sportspersons want to maximise their potential. This trade-off points to the difficulty of balancing the needs of national pride with the ones of individual athletes' economic needs (Agergaard et al., 2019).

Conclusion

This paper has traversed the complex landscape of the dual nationality issue of African athletes and its implications for sports development, cultural identity and national pride. Case studies from football, basketball and kickboxing have found a range of variables impacting athletes' choice of foreign allegiance. Foreign leagues are an economic draw, cultural identity's a tricky thing, and chasing global success has its own challenges, to name a few. As athletes like SadioMané, Alex Iwobi, GiannisAntetokounmpo and RiyadMahrez have travelled, it has shed light on the compromises that Africa's countries have had to make. Both the positive and negative effects of sports development have come to the fore as regards what is happening to athlete talent pools at home and abroad. The complex dynamic between economic commitment, cultural pride, and international acclaim has enriched the discourse surrounding the complex dilemmas all athletes face.

Given this exploration, future research could focus on athletes from other parts of the world and be extended to include an expanded view of the Global Sporting Diaspora. Comparative research between the continents and between sports disciplines would help to develop a more complex understanding of the common and discipline-specific aspects of athlete decision-making.

Recommendations and Policy Implication

With athletes choosing to represent foreign countries, strategic policy development will be key to navigating the course that suits global aspirations and sustainable development of domestic sport.Here are some recommendations that provide a path for decision makers to guide themselves as they tackle this complex space.

1. **Strategic Investment in Grassroots Development:** A key recommendation is the strategic investments in grass root development programmes. The success of the grassroot initiatives is demonstrated by the fact that Nigerian-born Alex Iwobi plays for Nigeria. Policymakers may consider broad-based programs in order to discover and develop talent at an early age and build a strong talent pool to reduce the risk of losing talent to other countries.
2. **Enhancing Domestic League Structures:** The improvement of domestic league structures is identified as a key approach. Senegal's football star SadioMané has enjoyed a successful summer with Liverpool, which is just another reminder of the international stage foreign leagues offer. African countries can take advantage of this by developing the local leagues to become more competitive, and ensuring that they are a place where the best players stay and that they are noticed by the world**.**
3. **Incentivizing Athletes for National Representation:** Proactive measures are taken to incentivise athletes for their service to the country. Footballers such as Nigerian star Victor Moses have been quoted as falling for the glamour of international matches, and have opted for the English team instead of playing for their own. Policymakers could consider creating arrangements where it is profitable for athletes to compete for their home country, thus linking the desires of the athletes with pride and honor of the home country.
4. **Creating Sustainable Economic Models**: A key part of policy making is the generation of sustainable economic models in the sporting world. Policy makers should look into ways to make the economic benefits from athletes' success in the international arena a positive flow to the development of domestic sports infrastructure. This also involves systems for reinvesting returns into grassroots programmes, training facilities and sports development generally.

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