Sidelines and Solidarity: Race and cultural hegemonies in the transition from mission to national soccer in Fiji and South Africa

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Abstract

Comparing experiences in two widely differing yet not totally dissimilar multiethnic, formerly colonial countries, Fiji and South Africa, this paper looks at the context and significance of soccer in assignations of race, ethnicity and class under colonialism and apartheid in soccer in the two. In doing so it formulates hypotheses on, and analyses and draws conclusions on the instances of sublimation of, and resistance to, diktats of race, ethnicity, class, colonialism and apartheid. As a first step it examines and contextualises the transformation of soccer in Fiji from being part of Christian missions and their school curriculum, between 1900 and 1961, to its present standing as a sport of urban leisure. This foregrounds immediate points of comparison with the history and role of missions and schools in South Africa. The role of the Fiji Indian Football Association (Fiji Indian FA) between 1938 and 1961 is examined for complicity and colonial agency towards separate development of races in Fiji. The transition to inclusive national associations in Fiji and South Africa is examined in wider hegemonic contexts – colonial and under internationalism – for the creation and erasure of ethnic sidelines, with particular attention to a moment of serendipity in 1961 to the sport in both countries and their affiliation with FIFA.