

Miracle or Debacle? Anti-Colonialism, Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism in Reports of the Friendly Football Match between Kenya and Ghana in 1965

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Abstract: *This article examines the 1965 friendly football match between Kenya and Ghana within the broader context of Kenya's early post-colonial era. It conducts a textual analysis of pre-match reports to reveal how the Ghanaian national team was portrayed as a symbol of decolonialism. Additionally, the study investigates the role of journalism in transforming public frustration regarding the match's outcome into a critique of the government. Finally, it discusses how various interpretations of this match have contributed to the construction of collective memories, especially in the context of pan-Africanism. This research sheds light on the complex interplay between sports, political sentiments, and social dynamics in a newly independent Kenya.*

1. INTRODUCTION

During the Jamhuri Day (Kenyan Independence Day) celebrations in 1965, Kenya invited the Ghana Black Stars - the national football team of Ghana - to play two friendly matches. In the first match, the Kenyan national team lost to the Black Stars with a humiliating 2-13 score, making it a traumatic memory in the history of Kenyan football.

Modern football has evolved from a noble sport originating in medieval England to a globally popular sport today. It is no longer just a "common game in the slums," but a cultural performance and daily practice that is closely linked to national development, political transformation, and globalization. Anthropologist Max Gluckman was the first to place this sport in a macro-social context[1], and since then, more studies of football have explored social issues such as gender, class, race, etc. in different times and spaces[2].

As the most popular cultural pastime, football also has historical, social, political, and cultural significance for African Studies[3]. Nkwi and Vidacs suggest that people in Jordan and Cameroon express their discontent through competition on the field, but such expressions can also be manipulated by politicians[4]. Paul Darby traces the transcontinental exchange of football talent between Europe and Africa, noting that its inequality and disparity has never changed, mirroring the political and economic relations between the two regions[5]. Focusing on white football in South Africa in the 20th century, Chris Bolsmann explores how racial policies and international opinion in South Africa contributed to its rise and led to its decline[6]. However, Kenya, a non-football powerhouse, has not received much attention for its national football[7], especially this most humiliating game in the history of Kenyan football.

Unlike most studies that focus only on matches played 'upon' the football pitch, I attempt to include texts 'outside' the pitch as well. Thus, this article focuses not on the 1965 Ghana-Kenya friendly match itself, but on the newspaper narratives and coverage. Newspapers are one of the most important public spheres on the African continent. As "editors saw themselves as reformers, duty-bound to curb corruption and uphold standards[8]," their creative work has made their newspapers extremely engaged with issues such as political transformation and the moral construction of society in Africa[9]. The coverage of football also has strong political overtones. Richard Pelt argues that the sportswriter in Africa often makes political statements about nation building and development in his football coverage, which gives him the status of what he calls "development journalist"[10]. Andreas Mehler explores the press coverage of the national team's performance at the 2010 World Cup in South Africa in the newspapers of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, noting that the coverage contains political discourse on the themes of patriotism, nationalism and peace[11]. Emmanuel Ifeduba examines Nigerian newspapers that focus on foreign football clubs, arguing that the emergence of these kinds of newspapers signifies the beginning of a new culture of media imperialism[12]. All in all, the study of African football journalism has led to a closer and broader connection between the game and its macro-context.

This article places the news coverage of the 1965 friendly match in a wider context of Kenya in the early post-colonial period. Through the textual analysis of pre-match preview reports, the first section contextualizes how their opponent, the Ghanaian national team, was constructed as an image of decolonialism. In the second section, I will examine how journalists tactfully transformed people's anger at the result into discontent with the government. Finally, drawing on a range of (re)interpretations of this game, I will explore how collective memories have been constructed in the context of pan-Africanism.

2. UNDEFEATED GHANA: ANTI-COLONIALISM IN PRE-MATCH REPORTS

Football, a sport introduced to Africa by European colonialists, is closely associated with its decolonisation. After the 20th century, it was Africanised as a representation of local self-expression and popular resistance against colonial rule[13]. For instance, in 1938, Nnamdi Azikiwe founded Zik's Athletic Club (ZAC) and used the team's participation in tournaments as an opportunity to publicly denounce colonialism[14]. In the post-colonial period, only the national teams of independent countries could play in international matches, which further enhanced the decolonising role of football. A match between Ghana and Nigeria in 1960 marked the beginning of friendly matches between newly independent African nations as a celebration of African Independence Day[15]. Kenya also followed this trend and celebrated their Jamhuri Day in 1965 with a friendly match against Ghana's Black Stars[16].

In the days leading up to the friendly match between the Kenyan national team and Ghana's Black Stars, the Daily Nation published preview stories about the Ghana national team's achievements. However, these stories focused on the team's record in Europe rather than on their accomplishments in Africa. In "Black Stars for Kenya – it's official!" for example, Costa does not list any specific achievements of the Ghanaian national team in Africa, but emphasises that the team is the one that "a couple of years back beat the famous Spanish professional team, Real Madrid[17]." Similarly, in a preview article a week before the start of the tournament, when describing the team's achievements in Africa, the writer only briefly mentioned that they were "the Alt-Africa Cup champions for two years running[18]." But as the subtitle of this article - "... the team that held Real Madrid" - shows, the author looks back at that 1962 match with a detailed description:

A year after the successful European tour, the Black Stars tested their strength against the world-renowned Real Madrid Football Club, the fabulous professional European Club, in Accra. Real Madrid fielded soccer maestros like Puskas and Di Stefano. Real Madrid gave a model soccer lesson to the Black Stars but the famous professionals were lucky to escape with a 3-3 draw. It was one of the greatest matches ever played by the Stars[19].

And the "successful European tour" mentioned here refers to the series of friendlies the Black Stars played against European countries in 1961[20]. Again, the author describes their success in detail with concrete data. They were "cramming 12 matches into 42 days. Out of these matches the Stars won eight, drew one and lost three[21]."

Why did all the pre-tournament preview stories adopt such a narrative structure highlighting the glory that Ghana had won in Europe? The narrative structure of these stories can be closely linked to the context of decolonisation in Kenya. Kenya had just emerged from a difficult decolonisation campaign amidst a worldwide anti-colonial wave. During the Mau Mau uprising, Kenya witnessed catastrophic events, including the Lari Massacre, which led to the killing or detention of 1,250,120 Africans[22]. After 1956, Kenya experienced three years of civil war, during which British forces confined over 30,000 African individuals in concentration camps and were responsible for the slaughter of more than 13,000 African individuals. During the seven years between the downfall of the Mau Mau and the attainment of independence, Britain still struggled to safeguard its critical economic and strategic interests while navigating these conflicting forces[23].

For Kenya, which had endured such a hard struggle for independence, its conflict with the old overlords of Africa, including Britain, was projected onto the game of football. Hence, "European soccer supremacy threatened by Africa[24]" became an anti-colonial feature story. For newly independent African countries, a mere victory on the football field was enough to prove that they had the potential to match or even surpass Europe in other areas, such as politics and economics. Kwame Nkrumah even declared football to be a barometer of international standing for newly independent African nations[25]. In 1962, he cast the national team in an ambassadorial role when he suggested that they embark on a tour of Europe as a way of instilling national confidence and challenging European prejudices about Africans[26]. As a result, people in Africa often 'overemphasise' the political metaphor of the game.

Ghana Black Stars, known as "the finest exponents of soccer on the African continent[27]," symbolised the challenge of independent African states to European regimes. As with newspapers in other parts of the world, the Spanish-Portuguese domination of European soccer was often mentioned in the Daily Nation's football news reports in the 1960s[28]. As one of the oldest clubs in Spain, Real Madrid dominated Europe during this period, winning the initial five European Cups from 1956 to 1960[29]. Thus, when the Ghana Black Stars were invited to play a friendly match at Real Madrid in 1962, European newspapers commented that "the match-up was dubbed as a 'David and Goliath' encounter[30]" because of Real Madrid's legendary status. However, the match ended in a '3-3' draw, which "greatly enhanced the reputation of the Black Stars as a world soccer force[31]." Clearly, the game was seen as a challenge by African football to European football and was given an anti-colonial meaning as a result. This is why Daily Nation told the story several times in their pre-match coverage. Although this narrative still portrays Europe as the higher status "challenger," which, to some extent, maintains Africa's position on the periphery, we should not overlook or deny the decolonial nature of this narrative.

The temporal information provided in the Daily Nation's reporting is intriguing as well. Timing is one of the most crucial elements of a story, especially in retrospective stories, where the choice and description of a particular time are often influenced by the historical significance behind it. In the pre-game reports that introduced the Ghana Black Stars, the writers have repeatedly highlighted, explicitly or implicitly, Ghana's independence year. "The status of Ghana in football in Africa has mounted since 1959"[32]; "Since that memorable day, Black Stars have injected their team with new blood[33]," and so on. Thus, the stories successfully link the success of Ghanaian football to the political factor of national independence. This writing technique once again highlights the anti-colonial dimension of these reports.

In summary, the successful experiences of the Ghanaian national football team in Europe in the 1960s provided a decolonial narrative for Kenyan newspapers. In terms of narrative structure, the writers detail Ghana's achievement against European rather than African teams in the pre-match coverage. Furthermore, they attribute all of Ghana's success to the political causes of their national independence by introducing a temporal dimension.

3. "WE NEED A MIRACLE": COLLECTIVE EMOTION, NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES AND NATIONALISM IN POST-MATCH REPORTS

On the occasion of Jamhuri Day at Jamhuri Park in Nairobi, Harambee Stars, the Kenyan national football team, suffered a lopsided 2-13 defeat to Ghana's Black Stars[34]. Football is a highly charged and perilous arena that often generates intense collective emotion[35]. Following a humiliating match such as this, it is not uncommon for emotions such as anger, humiliation, shame, resentment, and other unpleasant feelings to emerge, particularly in international squad matches where patriotism and nationalism can play a role, intensifying these sentiments[36].

Anger is often directed at players, coaches, or opponents[37], but in the post-match coverage of the Daily Nation, journalists offered the highest praise to the Harambee Stars players and coaches. Brian Marsden, for instance, commended "Coach Batchelor (the coach of Kenyan national team) provided the plan and the players deserve the highest praise for carrying it out to the letter[38]," while also noting that "the players deserve the best[39]." Such an emphasis on the players and coaches may be understood as part of the process of constructing a national identity for Kenya during this period.

Football and identity are closely intertwined. Almost all clubs around the world play some role in identity politics to a greater or lesser extent[40]. In Kenya, football clubs play an important role in building ethnic identity. The most typical club is Gor Mahia, which tries to construct Luo identity in all aspects of the team. For instance, they use the word 'Sirikal' in the lyrics of their club's anthem, which is the Luo adaptation of the Swahili word 'Serikali' (state), to express Luo dissatisfaction with their marginalised political status[41]. As a result, for multi-ethnic countries, national team players often have different identities and backgrounds, representing different communities and ethnic groups. When national teams of these countries lose a match, the anger of the spectators at the underperforming players can often develop into an attack on their communities.

As its name suggests, Harambee Stars symbolises the hope of nationalism in Kenya, and journalists may be eager to reawaken a united Kenya with reports about the friendly match played during the Independence Day celebration[42]. The concept 'Harambee' (literally let us work together) was officially introduced by Jomo Kenyatta in his inaugural speech in 1963, which called for the elimination of differences[43]. It is an integral element of Kenyan nationalism[44]. However, this ideal did not become a reality in 1965, and the construction of ethnicity in Kenya remains a challenge. The legacy of Lamu's history was not fully resolved with regard to nation

building[45]; with border areas still in a regime vacuum[46], "a great many residents of the new Kenyan nation-state did not see themselves as Kenyan at all[47]," and more importantly, nationalism did not replace tribalism. Even Jomo Kenyatta himself did not encourage nationalism. According to him, the primary concern of any Kenyan politician should be fostering ethnic harmony, as only then can the focus shift towards nation-building[48]. He even believed that a pan-ethnic nationalism carried the risk of denying others the responsibility that they owed to themselves[49]. Thus, until today, there still remains the challenge of nationalism in modern Kenya[50]. Consequently, journalists were reluctant to focus on any players' mistakes in their post-match reports, lest the public take out their anger on them and the communities they represent.

Surprisingly, all the anger was directed towards the government. The general feeling among the journalists was that the Kenyan government was responsible for the loss, just as the key reason for the Ghana Black Stars' victory was that they were supported by their government[51]. "The 13 goals that hit the back of the Kenya net last Saturday should be taken as a king size kick to the pants to wake them up[52]." Considering how "a successful and talented team like the Black Stars boosts the image of Ghana as they score soccer victories in Africa and Europe[53]," they required that the Kenyan government "MUST take a deep interest in sport[54]" and "use modern methods[55]." They suggested that "as a start, the FA of Kenya must be remoulded[56]," and calls were made for government agencies to reform, such as the creation of a national authority for sport[57].

However, these criticisms were not solely directed towards the government's involvement in football. They were also an expression of the journalists' dissatisfaction with the government's overall performance and politics in post-colonial Kenya. Since gaining independence, the government had failed to deliver on its promises. Faced with mass protests by the people calling for redistribution[58] and a mutiny for higher salary[59], government officials were busy with factional fighting. Although this period of government appears relatively peaceful compared to the period after 1966 when Kenyatta and Odinga actually split[60], we should not underestimate the situation. Because factionalism and internal divisions were a tradition of the Kenya African National Union almost since its inception[61]. However, censorship and authoritarian rule made it difficult for such discontent to be expressed openly.

Cyprian Fernandes was one of Kenya's most famous sports journalists. He wrote an article before the match and a post-match report titled "It's Time for Action". In his memoirs, he described the horrific atmosphere of Kenyan journalism during this period. "Death threats aimed at journalists and other prominent people were fairly standard in Nairobi during the late 1960s[62]," and he himself also received a death threat, which prompted him to leave Kenya for England in 1974 and eventually settle in Australia[63]. In the 1960s, Fernandes and other journalists had to "walk the political tightrope[64]" to balance survival and expression. Fortunately, football-related political institutions were relatively insignificant, and attacking them carried relatively low risk. Therefore, journalists used football as a means to amplify and increase the impact of their criticism of the government.

To summarize. Following the Kenyan national team's devastating 2-13 loss to the Ghana Black Stars, multiple post-match reports from the Daily Nation expressed anger towards the government. This approach was not solely due to the poor performance of the football establishment within the government, but rather stemmed from a larger dissatisfaction with the country's prospects for nation-building and the government's overall performance. However, as time passed, and the game became a significant historical event, it remains to be seen how the coverage and interpretation of the post-game anger will evolve in the decades to come.

4. "REMEMBERING THE FOOTBALL DEBACLE": PAN-AFRICANISM IN THE REPORTS OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Like many humiliating matches, this friendly has become part of the collective memory in Kenya. However, the retrospective coverage of the match over the next half-century has presented a complex, multi-dimensional narrative.

On the one hand, much of the Daily Nation's subsequent coverage portrayed the match as a Kenyan trauma. For instance, the newspaper referred to it as "the darkest day in Kenya's sporting history[65]." When Kenya Harambee Stars were invited to play a friendly match against Uganda in 1966, the Daily Nation recalled the previous year's friendly in their report and criticized the Football Association, who they claimed "must have very short memories[66]." Given the strength of the Ugandan national football team, the journalist sarcastically pointed out that the Kenyan FA had "put our soccer prestige on the chopping block for the sake of a few shillings and cents[67]." Similarly, in the 1978 East African Challenge Cup outing in Malawi, Kenya suffered a crushing defeat

of 9-0 to Zambia in a group match. It was interpreted as "echoes of the 2-13 catastrophe in 1965 reverberated across Kenya[68]" as well.

Influenced by the post-match coverage in 1965, the game and its humiliating 2-13 scoreline became a cultural symbol and a tool for criticizing the Kenyan government that is still being employed today. In a story published by the Daily Nation in 2012, Roy Gachuhi recalled the lengthy interview with then-Ghanaian coach Gyamfi following the defeat. He suggested, "when you read what he said, and you perceive the utter simplicity of the strategies he lays for success, you must be understood for mourning our lost generations - the victims of bankrupt leadership[69]." Gyamfi's advice to the government at the time in the interview was highlighted once again, with him stressing that, "Another important factor is government aid. All governments should realize that sport is one of their best investments[70]." This passage proves again that today in Kenya, that humiliating friendly has become a political discourse critical of the government after decades have passed. But the first part of the text - about the recognition of Gyamfi - also shows a friendly impression of the game's opponents and their coach.

It is uncommon to find an opponent portrayed positively in the collective memory of a humiliating football match. However, the 1965 match between Kenya and Ghana has been an exception. In decades past, they have often used the term "a proper lesson in soccer finesse[71]" to describe that game. Although Kenya "suffered the worst defeat at the hands of his free flowing African champions[72]," the Daily Nation hailed the Ghanaian coach, Charles Gyamfi, as an African legend who was instrumental in "bringing his great football heritage to Kenya," and described his relationship with Kenya as a "brotherly friendship[73]."

This unique memory pattern is closely linked to the popularity of pan-Africanism. As what "Fare thee well, Gyamfi", an article published by the Daily Nation after Gyamfi passed away, mentioned:

When you think of Charles Gyamfi, an entire era comes to mind. Kwame Nkrumah, who used football in his dream of a United States of Africa and told Gyamfi and his colleagues to ask for whatever they wanted so as to make this happen[74].

Apparently, pan-Africanism has fostered a distinct footballing environment in Africa, characterized by strong connections between national teams. Since the 1960s, Nkrumah has sought to cultivate a 'brotherhood' across West African countries through sport[75]. This sentiment has translated into a collective African identity in the world of football, and independent African countries have often acted collectively in the interests of Africa. One notable example of this was the joint decision by 15 African countries, led by Nkrumah and the Ghana Black Stars, to boycott the World Cup in 1966. FIFA imposed a fine of £400 per country[76], but this action eventually resulted in Africa being granted a qualifying spot for the 1970 Mexico World Cup[77]. The influence of pan-Africanism on African football has endured into the 21st century[78]. Especially in Kenya, pan-Africanism has had a particularly strong impact. Considering the elder tradition in the native culture, the founding father of Africa has a more massive national authority than in other continental countries. Thus, the influence in Kenya of the pan-Africanism espoused by Kenyatta, known to Kenyans as Mzee[79], should not be underestimated. Such a context lends a harmonious aspect to Kenya's collective memory of the 1965 friendlies.

All in all, the memory of the 1965 match between Kenya and Ghana is multi-faceted. On the one hand, the coverage shaped it as a collective trauma for Kenya, and the post-match reports utilized it as a political tool to criticize the government. On the other hand, the popularity of pan-Africanism lent a harmonious and beautiful dimension to the collective memory of this traumatic event.

5. CONCLUSION

This article focuses on coverage by the Daily Nation of a friendly match in 1965 between the Ghana Black Stars and the Kenyan national team, analysing it within the social context of Kenya in the 1960s. Due to Kenya's difficult journey to independence, the writers adopted a narrative structure that emphasized the Ghana Black Stars' achievements in Europe and skimmed over their achievements in Africa in the pre-tournament reports. As a result, the Black Stars' challenge to European teams was transformed into a decolonial narrative of Africa challenging Europe. In the post-match coverage, faced with a humiliating 2-13 scoreline, the journalists attempted to guide readers towards transforming their collective anger into a critique of the government. This narrative technique not only fights against tribalism and constructs Kenyan nationalism but also makes sports reporting a stage for political expression. Finally, I analyse how the news coverage shaped the collective memory of the match in the following decades. Unlike the collective memory of humiliating games in other regions, Kenya's long history of political

dislocation and the influence of pan-Africanism has resulted in a unique pattern of "trauma" and "harmony" intertwined.

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