

RADIO SOCCER COMMENTARY AS RECONSTRUCTION AND  
PERFORMANCE OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL-CULTURAL REALITY:  
THE CASE OF KENYA IN THE 1980s

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## **Abstract**

This paper has developed the argument that African soccer and the practices that have developed around it can be perceived as a site for the re-construction and performance of political and socio-cultural reality. It is an argument that fits in a discourse that has been developed by, among others Peter Alegi (2010), Michael Schatzberg (2006) and Richard Giulianotti (1999). The paper locates its significance to the selected panel in two ways. First, it perceives Kenyan radio soccer commentary as a performance practice; in the sense that it is not a strait-jacket mediation of soccer match events but a distinct oral performance that fits in the genre of popular culture.

Secondly, political and social cultural themes can be read to be underlying these radio soccer commentary performances, an observation that has also been made by Tern Van Dijk (1985) in his proposed approach to the analysis of media texts. Thirdly, the paper observes that the mediatization of soccer is not a simple instrumentalist process but a larger performance practice.

The major assumption of this paper is that an analysis of the structure and texture of the Kenyan radio soccer commentaries of the 1980s reveals patterns of the political and socio-cultural reality of that era. The paper adopts the inter-textual approach in the reading and interpretation of the radio soccer commentaries. We also draw upon Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical approach to cultural texts. The methodological approach of this paper involves the selection and of samples of audio-recorded commentaries of Kenyan soccer in the 1980s from the Kenyan Broadcasting Cooperation (KBC). These are subjected to content analysis and the emergent structural and textural patterns perceived against the background of the Kenyan society and culture of the 1980s. The conclusions drawn from the analysis and interpretation of the audio commentaries will be perceived against the background of our overall view that soccer cultures are sites for re-creation and performance, an observation that is perhaps put more clearly by Giulianotti (1999) in his observation that different cultures and nations have constructed their unique forms of identity through their interpretation and practice of soccer.

## **Introduction**

Sport mediatization is a distinct performance genre that straddles media practice on the one hand and the cultural practice of sport fandom on the other. This is an argument that has also been made by David Reffue (2005:4) in his observation that sport mediation involves a nexus of culture, sport and media. As a performance form, it has largely been subsumed under the title ‘Sports Announcer Talk’ (SAT). However, leading SAT discourses such as Jeffrey Reaser (2003), Marie-Laure Ryan (1993) and Charles Fergusson (1983), have tended to adopt a Formalist approach, in which the linguistic process of chronological description, discussion and interpretation of sport events is emphasized.

In this sense, focus is on what we could term as the facilitative role of language in the process of the reconstruction and representation of sport events. However, we have argue that a critical perception of the contextual and linguistic framing of these sport events shows evidence of underlying thematic perspectives. We have understood the concept of framing at two levels, firstly, we perceive framing at the structural level where we consider sport commentary as a media text that proceeds along certain stages, akin to ritual. In this sense, we consider the big frame of the sport event to consist of the preamble, the body, the interval, and the closure.

We have used preamble in reference to the period between the beginning of the broadcasts and the actual start of the sport event. The body refers to the reconstruction of the actual flow of the sport event. The interval refers to the break between the first and second halves of the match. The closure, like the preamble, is the period between the actual end of the sport activity and the end of the broadcast. We have argued that much as the themes of the commentary are encoded at all the four points, it is the preamble, the interval and closure frames that are best suited for reiteration of the basic themes. This is probably because they are moments when there the game on the soccer pitch isn’t running, yet the commentator’s verbal performance is running. Therefore, there is space for him to see and reconstruct other aspects within the soccer stadium.

At the second level we have understood the concept of frame in the sense it has been used by Eva Lavric et al. (2008:12); as rhetoric strategies that characterize language use in specific communication situations. They argue that in most cases the type of frame chosen depends on the perspective taken by the language user towards the subject matter. In this way, certain

thematic patterns can be read to be inscribed in the apparently ‘neutral’ accounts of the sport commentaries. This mainly comes through in the texture of the commentaries and is perceived in the apparent perspectives that seem to inform the modes of description and detail included and/or excluded in the commentary.

In both cases, we have argued that the Kenyan political and socio-cultural circumstances seem to inform the framing and texture of sport events. We have narrowed down to the sport of soccer, focusing on the radio soccer commentaries performed in the Voice of Kenya (VOK), which was later renamed Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC). Our methodology consists in the selection of sample audio-clips of the radio football commentaries of the 1980s, which we subject to both semantic and stylistic analysis.

### **Structural Frames**

**(a) Reconstructing Space and Power:** In the 1980s live coverage of soccer matches was frequently preceded by an elaborate introduction that put into one perspective the physical and socio-cultural aspects of the context of the soccer match event. In each case, the impression created was that of a social drama that involved the illumination of a stage larger than the stadium and an introduction of many other ‘players’ besides the soccer players. Ultimately, this session took on the shape and function of a prologue in conventional performances, as is evident in the following examples:

Harambee Stars imezunguka ile duara ya katikati kuwasalimia wananchi ambao wako hapa na ni kwa wingi kweli kweli. Na wanazunguka katika upande wa goli ya huku upande wa Nairobi West, wakati Malawi wakiwa wamevalia mavasi ya bendera ya inchi yao, wako upande wa town, yaani kuelekea upande wa town. Goal-keeper anaajaribu upande wake vile ulivyo, na huku wakenya nao wakiwa wanajaribu upande wao vile ulivyo. Kumbuka ya kwamba leo katika wakati wa mchana kidogo, kulinyesha mvua kwa hivyo kiwanja kiko na katika hali ya ubaridi. Na vile vile baridi yenyewe siyo ndogo hapa kiwanjani. Wakenya wote wanaocheza, wamekwenda katika upande wa goli yao, wakiwa wanafanya duara ndogo, na kuomba mambo yawe mazuri, na pengine kupeana mashauri ya mwisho kabla ya mchezo kuanza. Wananchi wanapiga kelele za Nyayo, Nyayo, wakati mzee mwenyewe yuko pale, akiwa amevaa leo Sambrero moja ya kupendeza kweli kweli, na karibu baraza lote la mawaziri liko, kwani nikikutajia mmoja, huenda mwingine nikamsahau, tukaweza kuwa katika lawama bure. Lakini wale waliofika ni wengi kwa hakika, pamoja na manaibu wa mawaziri, makatibu wakuu, na vile vile wenyeviti wa mashirika mbali mbali ya serikali, na hata yale ya binafsi.

*Harambee Stars is standing round the centre circle of the pitch to greet the fans in the stadium who are very many. And they are rotating on the side of the goal that is in the direction of Nairobi West, while Malawi who are wearing playing kit that is in the colour of their country's flag are on*

*the side of town, that is the side of the pitch that is in the direction of town. Their goal-keeper tests his goal-posts while the Kenyans also test their side. Remember that it rained earlier today and therefore the stadium is rather cool. Indeed, it is cold here in the stadium. All the Kenyans players have moved to their goal, they have made a small circle, and praying for success and maybe for last minute instructions before the match starts. Kenyans are making noises of Nyayo, Nyayo, while the old man himself is seated there, dressed in very attractive costume. And almost the whole cabinet is here, so if I name names I may end up forgetting one of them and get into needless trouble. But those who are here are truly many, together with the assistant ministers, permanent secretaries, and heads of public and even private corporations.*

The foregoing clip captures part of the opening session of the All African Games semi-final soccer match between hosts Harambee Stars (Kenya) and the Malawian national team played on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August, 1987. The match is played in the Kenya International Sports Centre (KASARANI). The information we get from this clip is not only limited to the primary substance of the preliminaries of a soccer match but significantly covers elements of the geographical, socio-cultural and political realities of Kenya at this point in time. It is worth noting that these details are incorporated within the master narrative of the commentary in ways that do not mark them out as extrinsic – and maybe intrusive – but as part of the preamble of the commentary.

The geographical location of KASARANI stadium vis a vis the city centre and Nairobi West is brought in metaphoric sense. Ideally the physical phenomena serve to lend the audience a mental picture of the juxtaposition of the two teams on the pitch, but in real sense it is also a reconstruction and celebration of Nairobi as a distinct urban space. More important however is the fact that this ‘realistic location’ of the soccer match helps to give the radio commentary an authentic touch and in a sense the listeners that solely depend on this audio account of the match may easily get the feeling of being there through their imaginative experience. The audience also appreciates this commentary as part of their routine experience of life. This is an argument that echoes Eric Anchimbe’s (2008:133-142) observation that the language of soccer in Cameroon invokes the ecology of its immediate context and that this is an important strategy in locating the communication event of soccer commentary within its immediate context.

The clip quoted above also highlights President Moi’s presence in the stadium and the effect of his presence on the rest of the fans. The image created is that of a very popular and celebrated leader that captures the imagination of the fans in the stadium. The fans’ chants of Nyayo, Nyayo, Nyayo are in praise of the president, whose leadership philosophy of Nyayo had at this point in time become so identified with him that it had ultimately become similar to a praise name. His dress is described as colourful and most likely designed to make him stand out

of the crowd as star. The rest of the cabinet and top government officials are also said to be present and the commentator significantly declines to mention all the names of these government officials present because he runs the risk of forgetting to mention one of them, which according to him will surely get him into trouble.

The impression created from this circumstance is that at this point in time, the president and the rank and file of his presidency consider the soccer stadium as an important space in which power can be played and contested. At this point in time, it seems as if the president uses the soccer stadium to confirm his popularity and it is mandatory to the top members of government to perform their loyalty to him by attending these matches. It is in this sense that it would be 'risky' for it to be publicly known that so and so is absent, for then that may also be interpreted as defiance to the power of the president. B. A. Ogot (1995:187-213) has also observed that President Moi's leadership style was characterized by political patronage and populism. He argues that the Moi Presidency invoked the basic element of populism to construct a leadership style that was based on the belief in the supremacy of the will of the people and desirability of a direct relationship between the Presidency and the ordinary people.

It is worth noting that this political power play is worked into the commentary in a way that doesn't make it look external. President Moi and his 'team' are introduced as mere fans, part of the wider social drama. However, this apparently apolitical persona invokes his real position in the Kenyan society of the time, as the chief patron of any socio-cultural event that takes place in Kenya, and ultimately, as the most powerful man in the land.

Within the context of the 1980s, the concept of Nyayo cannot be perceived in isolation from the concept of 'Harambee'. Peter Ngalu (1987:523-525) has defined the term as 'lets-pull-together' self-help movement that is typically Kenyan and that has roots in the cultural heritage of most Kenyan ethnic communities. Barkan and Chege have traced the Harambee practice to the Kenyatta era and also emphasize its communal and autonomous character. Indeed, President Jommo Kenyatta's clarion call for social action was captured in the equation 'Harambee? – Nyayo!', the latter cast as the answer to the question posed in the former. President Kenyatta in particular made it a routine opening formula in his speeches; he would shout Harambeeee! The crowds would respond 'Nyayo!' This was in a sense a sort of password to the whole concept of nation building in Kenya. Underlying this clarion call was team-work and sacrifice. We can argue that the soccer stadium was one of those spaces that invoked and also concretized this

concept. It is perhaps against this background that President Moi considered the soccer stadium as the ideal space for the reconstruction and performance of the Harambee-Nyayo concept of nation building.

Apparently, the use of the soccer stadium as a site for the performance of political power in the 1980s was not limited to Kenya. Let's consider the following clip from Mambo Mbotela's commentary of the match between AFC Leopards of Kenya and Power Dynamos of Zimbabwe played in Harare, Zimbabwe on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 1983:

Kwa hivi sasa,  
Yaonekana ya kwamba,  
Waziri mkuu,  
Mheshimiwa,  
Bwana,  
Robert,  
Gabriel Mugabe,  
Naam ndiyo huyo,  
Ameingia hapa,  
Kati kati ya kiwanja hivi sasa,  
Ikiwa mbele,  
kuna mapikipiki karibu kama manane hivi,  
na magari yale ya polisi yanayomsindikiza.  
Vile Vile,  
Atafika,  
hapa katika uwanja,  
Rais,  
wa Zimbabwe,  
Mheshimiwa,  
Reverend,  
Bwana,  
Banana.  
Yeye akiwa ndiye Rais.

*At this time.  
It seems,  
The Prime Minister,  
Honourable,  
Mister.  
Robert,  
Gabriel Mugabe,  
Yeah, there he is,  
He has entered here,  
In the middle of the pitch now,  
while in front  
We have about eight motor cycles,  
and those police escort vehicles,  
also,  
he will arrive,  
here in this stadium,*

*The President,  
of Zimbabwe,  
Honourable,  
Reverend,  
Mister,  
Banana,  
he being the President*

It is significant that Mambo's verbal performance of in this clip is artistically elevated to the form of verse. He speaks in a controlled manner with regular pauses that create a sweet rhythm and also give the impression that the event being described is very important. The vivid description of the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, is such that it frames him as a hero. We argue that in this case Mambo has transposed the Kenyan practice of using the radio soccer commentary to hero-worship national leaders in the soccer stadium.

**(b) Commentaries as Performing of Personhood:** Another significant structural element of the 1980s radio soccer commentary performances was the social practice of 'sharing greetings' popularly known as 'kutuma salamu'. This was both embedded in the play-by-play section of the commentary and also at the half-time interval and sometimes even in the closure. Let us consider the following clip drawn from the match between AFC Leopards of Kenya and Power Dynamos of Zimbabwe played in Harare, Zimbabwe on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March, 1983:

Inakuwa ni half time! Half time! Kipindi cha kwanza kimekwisha, mabao, moja kwa moja ... Sasa, ni wakati wa kusoma haraka haraka simu hapa, tumezipokea nyingi kweli kweli. Aaaa, ya kwanza kabisa ni yako James Aburi ukiwa hapo sehemu za Rabai, unatakia timu ya AFC leopards ushindi, vile vile pia Victor Mbaji, ambaye ndiye leader of delegation anawakilisha KFF angelipenda pia kusalimia jamaa kule nyumbani, na mke wake pale Mombasa, na pia Rabai, kina Lebert Samburi Sola, hapo Bambam na wengineo. Pius Masinza anatuma salamu zake nyumbani kwa Juliana, Ernest, Julieta, Jeremani, Deina na Andrew, unasema wewe ni mzima. Peter Lichingu, anatuma salamu kwa baba akiwa Muhonja Webuye na mama Selina, na ndugu Samuel, na jamaa wote wanaomfahamu kule sehemu za nyumbani. Shilasi Patrick naye, salamu kwa baba na mama, wakiwa kule sehemu za nyumbani na Christopher Mwalimu na Rosemary. Salamu zingine ni zako Mike Weche, mchezaji wa AFC Leopards, unatuma kwa Maurine na Rossy na Shaban na Andrew Gikundi.

*It is half time! Half time! The first half is over, the score line is one apiece ... it is now time to quickly read the many telegrams we have received. First, is James Aburi who is in Rabai, your wish is that AFC leopards wins the match. Victor Mbaji, who is the leader of the Kenyan delegation and represents KFF would like to send his greetings to his family and his wife in Mombasa, and in Rabai too, people like Lebert Samburi Sola in Bambam*



*and others. Pius Masinza sends his greetings home to Juliana, Ernest, Juliet, Jeremiah, Diana and Andrew, you say you are fine. Peter Lichungu sends his greetings to dad at Muhonja, Webuye and mum Selina, and brother Samuel and all the relatives that know him at home. Shilasi Patrick sends his greetings to his dad and mum at home and to Christopher Mwalimu and Rosemary. Other greetings are from Mike Weche, a player of AFC Leopards, you send these greetings to Maurine, Rossy, Shaban and Andrew Gikundi ...*

This clip captures part of the coverage of the half-time interval of the match. The commentator, Mambo Mbotela, reads out the ‘greetings’ that are packaged in the form of telegrams. It is significant that the greetings are not introduced as independent aspects from the soccer match event. They are messages from members of the Kenyan delegation present in the stadium in Harare. These people are part and parcel of the event, including players of AFC Leopards. By sending greetings back home, they are also performing their identities. This is in the sense that, whereas conventional greetings are interpersonal, from a specific source to a specific target within a closed social circuit, these radio mediated greetings are public.

Essentially, by revealing the identity of the sender of the greetings, and their location, the greetings are essentially part of showing off. These people are in a sense just bragging for being in Harare watching the match, which can be considered as an achievement. They would like it to be known by everybody back in Kenya that they are in Harare. It is not even certain that the people greeted will get to hear them. However, the main point will have been made; the senders of the greetings will have signified themselves and in a sense performed their personhood. This echoes Karin Barber’s (2007:104) observation that personhood is emergent and processual. She further argues, “Persons are not given but made, often by a process of strategic and situational improvisation”. In this light, the communication of greetings from people in the soccer stadium to others beyond this context is mere posturing in which the project of performing personhood is mounted. It is significant that this practice of performing greetings has been part and parcel of the radio practices in Kenya, and is not necessarily limited to the radio soccer commentaries.

We also recognize the close relationship between this social practice of sharing greetings and the soccer practice of sharing opinion about soccer matches in Kenya. Indeed, in cases where fans got the opportunity to watch the matches they performed their greetings directly but as an appendage of their opinion of the matches. In this case, the blending of the two apparently disparate social aspects is striking. Opinion on the soccer matches is in a sense relevant to the commentary. However, when it is immediately followed by the performance of greetings it

seems like a distraction but considering the soccer match as a strategic space for the performance of personhood, the greetings are a relevant part of the performance. This process of performing personhood in the context of radio soccer commentary is comparable to the strategic placement of adverts mainly on television sport mediatization, which capitalizes on a captive audience.

It is a process by which the product is closely associated with the sport and in the process the characteristics of the sport are deemed to be also inherent in the product. We can argue that in the case of the performance of greetings within the radio soccer commentary, the reconstruction of other voices other than that of the commentator also creates the impression of a sharing of the power to speak between the commentator and the subjects of greetings. Considered within its immediate context, this momentary sharing of agency in the radio medium was very significant, because in the 1980s, there was only one radio station in Kenya. It was government owned and largely perceived as mouthpiece of the government.

Radio programming - even soccer mediatization - was largely framed as authoritative information from an official and elevated position to the passive ordinary consumer. This is an observation that has been made by Dinah Ligaga (2008) and Christopher Odhiambo (2007). Ligaga and Odhiambo argue that the Voice of Kenya (VOK) restricted the voices of radio to a monologue of sorts. Ligaga has argued that the radio drama script writers devised creative strategies of embedding alternative voices within their scripts (2008:1-2). In a sense we can perceive this social practice of performing greetings in the radio soccer commentary space as another strategy of multiplying voices in a media environment structure that was officially centralized. This is a practice that later developed into a more discursive scenario with the introduction of the FM Stations in Kenya, as has been observed by Odhiambo, (2007:151).

### **Thematic Perspective**

The sequence of events re-constructed in radio soccer commentary can also be understood in terms of their underlying themes. This is an approach that has also been proposed by Marie-Laure Ryan (1993:144-145). She has observed that the broadcast narrative configures the game by activating an underlying script and that this script is comparable to the concept of theme in literary narrative. In soccer commentary we can understand the reconstruction of the different matches as woven around certain beliefs and practices. In this sense then, the otherwise 'mere

play' of the soccer match event is transformed into patterns of human experience. These are largely framed in the dominant political and socio-cultural circumstances of the time.

We argue that a consideration of radio soccer commentary as thematic is inevitably related to its status as verbal art. In this light we invoke John Miles Foley's (1992:275-276) observation that in the enactment and performance of verbal art, there must be an enabling event - the performance - and an enabling referent - a tradition. Foley further argues that verbal art forms are "situated in part within *a set of associations and expectations* formally extrinsic but metonymically intrinsic to their experience as works of verbal art" – italics mine. What Foley describes as associations and expectations of verbal art can also be perceived as themes. The radio soccer commentary performance text can thus be interpreted in terms of both those aspects of verbal art which frame the event as it unfolds and those aspects which seem to reflect on themes that are read to underlie and inform the commentary. It is significant that these themes are encoded in both linguistic and supra-linguistic dimensions. Using examples from relevant clips we have explored what we consider as the most dominant themes of the 1980s radio soccer commentaries in Kenya: ethnic identity and nationalism.

**(a) Performing Ethnic Identity:** Gor Mahia and AFC Leopards were the most famous football clubs in Kenya in the 1980s. They also happened to be community clubs representing the Luo and Luhya ethnic communities of the Western region of Kenya. They attracted massive countrywide support. The commentaries of matches in which they were involved show a significant level of thematization, appealing to their status as cultural icons in the Kenyan society of the 1980s. This thematization is evident both in the main track of the play-by-play commentary and in the sub-narratives that are performed during the opening session, the half-time interval and at the point of closure.

In the Gor Mahia vs. Kenya Breweries match played on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of December, 1989 in Nyayo Stadium the tone of the play-by-play account of the match creates the impression that Gor Mahia is expected to win this match. Let's consider these examples:

...Anachukua Abbass Magongo, Abbass Magongo anakwenda, anampigia pale Odembo, Odembo anajaribu kumtilia tena aaa Antony Ndolo, ABASS MAGONGO ANAKWENDAAA, ANAMTILIA PALEE, PETER DAWOOOO! LAKINI NAFASI ILIKUWA IMEKOSA. Peter Dawo Abbass Magongo alimpigia Peter Dawo kwa mguu wake wa kushoto, lakini naye Peter Dawo akachelewa kidogo. Ilikuwa ni hatari moja kubwa sana katika lango la Kenya Breweries.

*...He takes it there Abbass Magongo, Abbass Magongo, Abbass Magongo dribbles, he passes it on to Odembo, Odembo tries to pass it again aaa Antony Ndolo, ANASS MAGONGO DRIBBLES, HE PASSES IT THERE TO, PETER DAWO!!! BUT THE CHANCE IS GONE. Abbass Magongo passed to Peter Dawo with his left foot, but Peter Dawo was slightly late. It was a real danger in the Kenya Breweries goal mouth...*

...Unachukuliwa tena pale na Tobias Ochola, Ochola anakwenda, anapiga huku mbele kujaribu kumtafuta Peter Dawo, unachukuliwa na Malupi Makuto, ananyang'anywa, unachukuliwa tenaa hapoo, anapiga vibaya, unachukuliwa na huyu eee Paul Onyera, Paul Onyera anaangalia apige wapi, anachukua Abbass Magongo, ABBASS MAGONGO ANAINGIA ANAPIGA KWA MBALI KABISA GOALKEEPER ANAPIGA INJE! CORNER. ABASS ALIPIGA MKWAJU MMOJA MKALI KABISA. JOSEPH KIBERA AKAUPIGA AKAUTOA INJE.

*...It is taken there again by Tobias Ochola, Ochola dribbles, he shoots it here in front trying to get it to Peter Dawo, it is intercepted by Malupi Makuto, he is dispossessed, it is taken over again there, he kicks it badly, it is taken by this eee Paul Onyera he looks where to pass it, Abbass Magongo takes it, ABBASS MAGONGO COMES IN AND SHOOTS FROM VERY FAR THE GOALKEEPER PUCHES IT OUT OF PLAY! CORNER. ABBASS HIT A VERY HARD SHOT. JOSEPH KIBERA PUNCHED IT OUT OF PLAY.*

The two sequences are taken from the play-by-play section of the commentary. The vocal dynamics of the commentator show that he adopts a louder, excited and alarmist tone when Gor Mahia's Abbass Magongo and Peter Dawo are on the ball; the two are the star players of the team. After the live coverage of action in which the two players are involved the commentator takes time to re-construct the action. One may argue that this is an indication of the importance of their action in relation to the rest of the event. In this sense we argue that the expectations for Gor Mahia to score, and go on to win the match, and the belief that they can do it, foregrounds itself as the main theme of the commentary. This is further emphasized by the fact that the level of noise from the stadium significantly increases at this 'thematic points'. Let's consider this sub-narrative performed at the closure of this particular match.

...uwanja umejaa mashabiki wa timu ya Gor Mahia. Wanacheza dansi kweli kweli. Wanabeba wachezaji juu juu. Abbass Magongo anabebwa juu juu, wanacheza wanaingia naye uwanjani. Wamemvalisha kofia ya mkeka, na wote inakuwa ni *Gor Biro*, yawne yo. Wanacheza wana furaha. Wana inchi wamejaa uwanjani kweli kweli, ikiwa wachezaji wengine wanaletwa hapa karibu na jukwaa, ili wakabidhiwe kombe la Moi Golden, na washindi wa pili, Kenya Bururi watapata ngao.

*...the pitch is full of Gor Mahia supporters. They are really dancing. They are carrying the players high up above their shoulders. Abbass Magongo has been carried high up, they are dancing with him as they enter the pitch. They are wearing raffia hats, and the whole stadium is Gor is coming give way. They are dancing happily. There are many people in the stadium, and*

*some players are being brought here at the dais so that they can be given the Moi Golden Cup, and the 1<sup>st</sup> runners up, Kenya Breweries will get the silver medal.*

It is evident that most of the people in the stadium are Gor Mahia supporters. Apparently, it is a highly excited crowd that is celebrating the victory together with the team. This seems to be a fulfillment of the expectations. The script seems to have been ‘Gor Mahia must win’, and in this case, much as it is a contest between two Kenyan teams, almost everyone in the stadium hopes that Gor Mahia wins, and everyone is happy when do. The cultural value of the raffia hat for the Gor Mahia fans cannot be gainsaid. This is a hat that is popular among the Luo, and in a sense signifies their identity as Luos. In this light, this soccer match could be perceived as a moment for the performance of Luo cultural identity. Richard Giulianotti (2002:30-32) has argued that the most committed and passionate fans believe that the support for their teams is meaningful to their concept of self identity.

The case of the Gor Mahia and AFC Leopards in Kenya can be understood in this light. Members of the Luo and Luhya communities respectively considered their support for their clubs as inevitably bound to their pride in and support for their ethnic group identity. This gradually elevated these teams above others, such as Kenya Breweries for instance, which were not community based. The Kenyan radio commentators inadvertently played into this tradition by seeming to side with the teams whenever they were involved in matches with other clubs. This became part of the process of thematization. It is significant that this subjective slant of radio soccer commentary has also been observed by Constantin Schreiber (2009:1-2) in her analysis of the performance of German soccer commentary in the Bundesligakonferenz. She observes:

*The commentators seemed to claim to be objective, but at the same time I always knew immediately upon hearing their voice where they were reporting from and that they were closer to the home team, sometimes taking its side and representing the region they were reporting from.*

The socio-cultural fabric of the German society is apparently marked by regions, which is equivalent to ethnic communities in the Kenyan society of the 1980s – to the present. Schreiber’s observation highlights what he terms a contradiction, in the sense that the radio commentaries in question are located at the federal level of the republic of Germany but seem to represent regional interests. We can perceive this as a performance of regional identity in radio soccer

commentary, comparable to the performance of ethnic identity in Kenyan radio soccer commentary.

**(b) Performing Nationalism:** There is a close relationship between performing soccer fandom and performing nationalism. As Anderson (1991:6) has observed that at the heart of nationalism is a communion of people based on real or perceived or shared experiences. In a way, soccer fandom is a metonym of nationalism, because it groups of people identify with teams and support them when they play against other teams; the soccer teams are metaphorized nations. This is largely because the Richard Giulianotti (2005: 386 – 410) has observed that typical supporters of soccer teams regard their connection to the club as a way of life and feel a traditional duty to support the teams irrespective of the changing fortunes of the teams. It is important that this connection between soccer fans and the teams and fellow fans is imagined and confirmed through the performance of specific activities in soccer stadiums. This echoes Hobsbawm's (1990:143) argument that nations are imagined communities.

The radio commentary also incorporates this nationalist spirit in the symbols of nationhood that are encoded and performed. It is significant to note that certain trends of nationalist expression of the 1980s Kenyan society can be perceived in the radio soccer commentaries of the time. . Let's consider the following sequences from the commentary of the match between Kenya and Tunisia played on 4/9/1987 in The Kenya National Sports Centre KASARANI.

... Haya, uwanja, umejaa kweli. Mimi sijaona ... nishaona katika masinema na mahali menginepo, lakini hapa Kenya, yenyewe sijaona kiwanja kujaa watu namna hii. Watu wengi kweli kweli, wengi ajabu. Hiyo alfu sitini ambayo ninaambiwa kiwanja hiki kinaweza kuchukua, basi nafasi ilioko labda ni ya wati alfu moja tu hivi ambao wanaweza kujaza sehemu iliyobaki ...

*... Right, the stadium, it is really full. I have never ... I have seen it is motion pictures in the Cinema and other such places, but here in Kenya, truly I have never seen a stadium this full. There are really many people. Amazingly many. That sixty thousand that is said to be the sitting capacity, maybe falls short by a mere one thousand people...*

... Anyangu amenyang'anywa mpira huo, lakini umekuwa mwingi, na umetoka mpira huo inje. Ni goal kick. Ndiyo hayo, ambayo yanasemwa na waswahili. Usimdharau binadamu mwenzako, kwani ukimnyanyasa na kumuona yeye yuko chini, wewe uko juu, kumbuka wewe siye uliyemuumba. Yule aliyemnyang'anya yeye ndiye aliyekupa wewe suhana wa thaala ...

*...Anyangu has been dispossessed of that ball, but it has been too fast and has gone out of play. It is a goal kick. It is what the Swahili say; never underrate a fellow human being, because if you mistreat him and perceive him to be inferior, and you are superior, remember you not the one that created him. The one who took away from is the one who gave you...*

The clip is part of the opening ritual, and the commentator describes the size of the fans in the stadium as ‘amazingly large’. It is a foregrounded and hyperbolic description that creates the impression that in this match the Kenyan team will enjoy a lot of support from the home fans. The second sequence is captured in a Swahili saying, that warns people against pride and arrogance. The commentator does not link this remark directly to the match, but within the circumstances, it is meant to be a summary of this particular soccer match, the fact that the underdog has triumphed, and that no one should dismiss Kenya as inferior in soccer again. This sequence invokes the popular soccer myth of ‘the favourite team losing to the underdog team because the latter worked hard and former rested on its laurels. Most important to our argument though is the other implied narrative of Kenyan fans having come in large numbers to support the team and the players having worked hard to uphold the prestige of the country.

There is also a tendency for the commentators to reconstruct the soccer match events in ways that account for the outcome. This is mostly done in ways that excuse the home team when it has performed poorly and can be performed as a strategy to uphold the dignity of the team since it also represents the dignity of the country. Let’s consider the following examples:

... Wanapoteza wakati sasa wa Kamerun, sijui kama ni njama yao ya kuweza kupoteza wakati, ama namna gani. Maanake tuliweza kuona wakianza kupoteza wakati , yaani delaying tactics, tangu kipindi cha kwanza. Kwa hivyo hatuelewi kama madhumuni yao mahsusi ya kuja hapa ni kupata draw ama namna gani. Maanake hawana haraka ...

*... Now the Cameroonians are wasting time, I wonder whether it is intentional or not. Because we saw them start to waste time, that is delaying tactics, from the first half of the game. Therefore we don't know whether or not their main objective of coming here was to get a draw. Because they are not in any hurry.*

... lakini ni mara yetu ya kwanza, aaa, kuwakilisha Afrika Mashariki katika mashindano haya ya kombe la kimataifa barani, na kama alivyosema huyo kijana kutoka Tanzania, ni muda wa kuweza kuwatayarisha vijana wetu kwa mashindano kama haya, ndio huwa mfupi sana, na ikiwa wanaweza kupata muda mrefu, kama vile timu hizi ambazo ziko hapa, zilianza kujitayarisha kwa mashindano haya mnamo mwaka uliopita ...

*... But it is our first time, aaa, to manage to represent East Africa in the African Cup of Nations, and like that young man from Tanzania said, it is the time to prepare our teams for such competitions that is always too short, if only they could get longer time to prepare, like the other teams that are here, they started preparing for this competition last year ...*

The first clip is extracted from the match between AFC Leopards and Dynamos of Cameroon played in Nyayo National Stadium, Nairobi. Ismail Mohammed (the commentator) makes this comment in the last five minutes of the second half, when AFC Leopards is leading by one goal. It is apparent that the expectations of the fans have not been met. One goal is perceived inadequate, especially considering the fact that AFC Leopards are playing at home, and will have to play the return leg away, in Cameroon. It is basically a poor performance on the part of AFC Leopards. But the commentator seems to be blaming it on the unwillingness of the players of the Cameroonian team to play positively. He alleges that the players have spent most of the match time wasting time. The logic of this remark is that AFC Leopards would have scored more goals if the Cameroonian team ‘played seriously’.

The second clip is drawn from a match between Kenya and Nigeria played on 20/3/1988 in Rabat, Morocco. The commentator seems to be giving an excuse for the poor performance of Kenya in this particular competition. First, that it is the very first time for Kenya to participate and secondly, that East African teams make adequate preparations for continental tournaments. Whereas these could be a true account of the circumstances, it may not be an adequate explanation.

Moreover, there is another underlying reality that is unexpressed in this context but which is equally strong; that the East Africa African region is not endowed with as much football talent as for instance the North and West African regions. In a sense, the commentator is largely trying to reconstruct the dignity of the team, which has been battered by the poor performance. It is important for him to do this because this is the African Nations Cup tournament and a context in which different African countries use soccer as a way of signifying their place within the larger context of African countries.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has developed the argument that the performance of sport commentary is not limited to the play-by-play account of sport events but is framed and also helps to frame an elaborate performance. This performance is characterized by the mediation of specific political and socio-cultural realities of the society in which the commentary is performed. In this sense the



mediatization of sport is both a reconstruction at two levels; first, a reconstruction of the sport event and secondly, a reconstruction of the realities of its immediate context. We have argued that these contextual realities are incorporated in two specific ways: firstly as part of the structural frames of the preamble, intervals and closure and secondly, as part of the texture of the main body of the commentary.

With specific focus has on Kenyan radio soccer commentary of the 1980s we have argued that these performances not only mediated soccer match events but also invoked the socio-cultural realities of the time. We have understood these socio-cultural realities as thematic in the sense that they seem to stand out of the commentaries in a way that connects these commentaries to real life experiences beyond the soccer match events. Our analysis of a sample of the Kenyan radio soccer commentaries of the 1980s has established dominant themes such as political power play, the social construction of personhood, ethnic identity, and state nationalism. We have established that the political power play and social construction of personhood are mainly coded in the structural nodes of the commentary, which are the preamble, the half-time interval and the closure. We have established that in the 1980s President Moi was a ‘major player’ in the soccer stadium. His power and popularity is played out in the stadium, and mediated through the radio soccer commentaries. However, this is done in ways that integrate this political power play within the conventional structures of soccer; politics is performed in the guise of soccer fandom.

We have also argued that the play of ethnic identity and nationalism is embedded in the texture of the commentary, which is evident in the modes and depth of description of the soccer match events. We have observed that the commentators overtly pose as neutral agents of the mediation process but covertly express certain views about some teams using both linguistic and supra-linguistic strategies. In a sense therefore, the commentators represent certain positions, which in the Kenyan case of the 1980s are defined by the celebration of – mainly Luo and Luhya - ethnic identity and expression of nationalist feelings towards the state.

The two major clubs of this era, Gor Mahia and AFC Leopards, were supported by the Luo and Luhya ethnic communities respectively. On the other hand, the government was also keen on fostering national unity during the 1980s. It is possible that soccer provided the best opportunity for these two socio-cultural realities to be expressed.

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