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Political Goals: Soccer as a Language of Politics in Kenya

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Soccer is Kenya's most popular sport, watched by almost every Kenyan. Soccer has a long history in Kenya, beginning with its introduction in the colonial period, when it was used by British colonists as a way to teach Kenyans European morals and values. In the postcolonial period, football was a similar political tool for Kenyan nationalist leaders, who built a sense of Kenyan identity on the back of the national team. But the Kenyan team has largely failed to produce results based on its level of support. Faced with political challenges like corruption and the persecution of dissidents, soccer has emerged as a coded language for discussing politics. Football allows Kenyans to discuss the issues facing their country without fear, and this essay tries to understand what the game means not just as a political tool, but as a part of Kenyan life.

Aden Marwa Range was set to be the only Kenyan referee at the 2018 World Cup in Russia, a proud moment for a nation whose rabid support of their soccer team has not been matched by its success on the international stage. Then, on June 7th, the BBC released footage of Marwa Range accepting a bribe from an undercover journalist, about $600 to fix a match at the African Nations Championship earlier that year.[1] On the eve of the tournament, the exposé shocked the world, and led to a reexamination of the state of African football. Nowhere was this more true than in Marwa Range's home country, Kenya. The *Daily Nation*, Kenya's leading newspaper, wrote that the bribery "…flies against the tenets of natural justice, and is an affront to the very heart of sports the world over – fair play."[2] While the *Daily Nation*'s suggestion that the bribery scandal was an affront to "the tenets of natural justice" may seem too grand in a discussion of soccer, the language used is indicative both of how seriously people take soccer

[1] BBC News Africa, *Betraying the Game: Anas Aremeyaw Anas Investigates Football in Africa - BBC Africa Eye Documentary*, accessed December 4, 2018. & "Kenyan Referee Resigns from World Cup after Bribery Sting," *ESPN.Com*, June 7, 2018.
[2] "Probe Bribe Claim on World Cup-Bound Ref," *Daily Nation*, accessed December 4, 2018.

and how common it is for readers to draw connections between corruption scandals in soccer and corruption more generally.

Football is the most popular game in the world: FIFA, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association, has more member states than the UN, and the World Cup final is the mostly widely watched televised sporting event in the world. Despite African teams' lack of success at the tournament, football is incredibly popular on the continent, and because it is so important to the fabric of African life, it has been widely studied by historians for its impact on society. Most of the scholarly works on football in former colonies in Africa and elsewhere have to do with identity creation—how has sport been used as a tool by political, religious, or social leaders to bind together groups of people into a unified political force. Historians writing in the first couple of decades after the end of the colonial era tended to look from the top-down, focusing their discussions on the ways in which sport has been politicized and moralized by both colonial officials and postcolonial leaders. What a meta-analysis of these histories reveals is the strength of the connection between sport and the state, with the successes and failures of national teams tied intrinsically to the fates of the countries they represent.

More recently, though, historians have tried to construct histories of the meaning of football to lay-people, and to show the implications of those meanings—if football is a place where Africans can come together in their communities, it may be a space where they discuss politically or socially sensitive issues. In Kenya, for example, I will argue that football has become a place for Kenyans to discuss corruption more broadly, and to think about the failures of the state to meet their expectations. This reading of sport as a coded language about corruption and power has a historiographical background, too. By incorporating histories of corruption and rumor in other contexts it becomes clear that there is a trend in postcolonial Africa of adopting

European practices and terms to talk about problems facing African states today. Because football is so ubiquitous, it is surprising that it has historically been neglected by historians as a place where those conversations have happened.

This essay attempts to provide a bottom-up view of history, sport, and politics in Kenya. Ideally this would be supported by interviews with non-elite members of Kenyan society about the role of soccer in their own lives, or by documents written by non-elite Kenyans themselves. Evidence of this kind would allow me to discuss with greater breadth and depth the extent to which football has become a language for politics for the broader population. But, due to a lack of online resources and time constraints, such documentation was largely unavailable to me. Instead, I have relied largely upon op-eds and editorials from two of Kenya's largest two newspapers, *The Daily Nation* and *The Standard*. These pieces are not fully representative of Kenya's population—they are written by Kenyans who have access to education and connections to the intellectual elite, and there are some issues that these sources cannot answer: do women talk about corruption using soccer in the same way? What about those living in rural areas, as the writers are largely based in Nairobi and Mombasa? And what about members of the younger generation? While they are somewhat limited, these sources do reveal the importance of football to everyday life in Kenya, and they are the beginnings of a history centered not so much on political institutions as on the people's response to those institutions. In writing this essay I have tried not just to show that football is a coded language for politics, but that such a bottom-up history *could* be done, with access to the right resources and time.

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Colonial historians have used sport, and football more specifically, as a way to understand nation-building projects under colonial regimes. Older scholars have viewed sport as

a political tool of institutions, useful in building and molding the identities of citizens and subjects. In "Sport and African Soldiers: The Military Diffusion of Western Sport throughout Sub-Saharan Africa," Anthony Clayton examines how sport was used by the British government to instill in African recruits and conscripts a sense of both British citizenship and Christian masculinity, and how the popularity of those games in the military led to their spread across the continent.[3] Clayton tries to examine both how sport was used by the colonizers and by the colonized, especially in his discussions of the later colonial period, but really only succeeds when discussing the early post-independence era. It is unclear whether this is due to a lack of sources or a lack interest, but Clayton's discussion of the importance of sport in the development of military elitism is fascinating. He argues that success by military teams "in sporting events…projects an army's view of itself as a custodian of virtues to the nation and public as a whole. Success in the white man's sports has also satisfied those who felt a need to catch up with the white man…."[4] Clayton's work is representative of a broader trend in the older literature, which views sport as a top-down tool of states and institutions to create loyalty and discipline.

Peter Mahlmann's article "Sport as a Tool of Colonialism in Kenya" has similar implications to Clayton's, though he looks at different institutions and different goals. Unlike Clayton, Mahlmann views the introduction of sport as somewhat nefarious and more intentionally manipulative on the parts of colonial rulers. The introduction of Western sports to Kenya helped to build an identity for Kenyans as Christian men, but more importantly it replaced the "savage" games that came before.[5] His work is very anthropological—he asks how sport

[3] Anthony Clayton. "Sport and African Soldiers: The Military Diffusion of Western Sport throughout Sub-Saharan Africa." In *Sport in Africa: Essays in Social History*, edited by James A. Mangan and William J. Baker, 114–38. Africana Pub. Co, 1987.
[4] Ibid, 130.
[5] Peter Mählmann. "Sport As A Weapon Of Colonialism In Kenya: A Review Of The Literature." *Transafrican Journal of History* 17 (1988): 152–71.

came to mean something in Kenya, and what qualities about various games have allowed them to be imbued with meaning. Mahlmann relies heavily on academic anthropological articles, as well as texts by British colonial officials about their visions of the use of sport. Here again, sport is a tool of the colonial ruler, but also of nationalist and anti-colonial leaders—he references the anthropological work by Jomo Kenyatta, who would become the first president of independent Kenya. But Mahlmann, like Clayton, fails to consider how Africans below the leadership level felt about sports and the use of sports for political purposes. Part of this may be due to a lack of sources, but his failure to even consider such a point of view is telling—it reflects an absence of interest in the lives of everyday Africans.

More recent scholarship has tried to fill that gap in the literature by moving beyond that top-down perspective to try to understand what football means to Africans. Much of their work has focused on countries and colonies whose national teams were successful on the international stage—Kenya is an interesting deviation from that trend, as its national team has been historically weak since independence. In *African Soccerscapes*, Peter Alegi strives to create a broad understanding of not just the impact football has had on Africa, but also the impacts Africa has had on football by looking at trends across the continent—what similarities are there, between, say Nigeria, Tanzania, and South Africa with regards to the ways in which soccer has been politicized.[6] Alegi's argument builds on the works of earlier scholars, like Clayton and Mahlmann, and is generally that football was introduced by colonialists through institutions like schools and the military, where soccer took root and spread, replacing traditional African games. Alegi goes on to trace the way in which, in the post-independence era, football—and particularly

[6] Peter Alegi. *African Soccerscapes : How a Continent Changed the World's Game*. Athens, OH, UNITED STATES: Ohio University Press, 2010.

national teams competing internationally—became a site for nation-making, a tool of identity-building used by the presidents of new African countries who often led countries with little to no infrastructure or sense of being a unified nation-state.[7] Football has been continuously politicized throughout its history in Africa. But throughout the book, Alegi looks at how Africans have tried to make the game their own, by using it to resist colonial rule, or as a way to build community networks in new urban centers.[8] Alegi's chronology and periodization is useful because it is not strict or sterile, and he allows for each period to affect the next: first, the colonial era; then the post-independence era; and finally the more contemporary post-colonial era.

Alegi's book is the first comprehensive work on soccer in Africa, and the trends that he is able to show across the continent are fascinating; that the sport was introduced and evolved in much the same ways throughout Africa is important to note. In some ways, though, Alegi's historical argument is too broad: his sourcing is impressive with regards to South Africa and Zimbabwe, but is limited to secondary sources when focusing elsewhere. He also makes some sweeping claims without providing much supporting evidence. For example, in his section on the importance of railroads in the spread of soccer, Alegi mentions six countries across three paragraphs, but fails to provide one good case study that might exemplify and strengthen his point.[9] While this is a minor example, it is indicative of a broader trend throughout the book. In paring down the breadth of the book, he may have been able to better find primary sources to support his claims. It also reveals a need for studies that focus more deeply on specific regions and time periods.

[7] Ibid, 54.
[8] Ibid, 36.
[9] Ibid, 6-8.

Similarly more recent scholars studying football in Kenya have turned towards studying the sport as a place where identities are created *by* Africans, not *for* them. Authors like W.W.S. Njororai and Solomon Waliaula have studied how football clubs in Kenya like AFC Leopards and Gor Mahia have become associated with Luhya and Luo ethnic identities, and how those identities are reinforced by the actions of Kenyans both inside and outside of stadiums.[10][11] For these scholars, football is still important in creating identity, as a place where Kenyans can come together and bond. But the process is seen less as an activity that can be manipulated by white settlers or by ruling parties for their own purposes; instead, soccer's political content is more a result of circumstance. In this reading soccer is not inherently politicized. Rather it offers a site that communities can gather around.

While these histories focus on the importance of sport as a place where communities can come together and interact, some talk about football's popularity in terms of its inherently fun nature, while others look at deeper meanings attached to it. These meanings can be understood through an analysis of sport and discussion about sport as a proxy for discussing political topics, a new language to talk about issues like corruption. In this sense, sport is less about identity-formation or fun than it is about a certain type of coded political communication.

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Soccer in Kenya developed as a political language because it was so politicized and so affiliated with state institutions, both by English colonists and by post-independence leaders. Soccer was introduced to Kenya by European traders and missionaries, and spread rapidly

[10] W.W.S Njororai. "AFC Leopards and Gor Mahia: Footballing Rivalry and Shared Political Underdog Status in Kenya." *Soccer & Society* 19, no. 5–6 (August 18, 2018): 811–28.
[11] Solomon Waliaula and Joseph Basil Okong'o. "Performing Luo Identity in Kenya: Songs of Gor Mahia." In *Identity and Nation in African Football: Fans, Community and Clubs*, edited by Chuka Onwumechili and Gerard Akindes, 83–98. Global Culture and Sport. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

alongside the development of colonial infrastructure. Soccer, or football as it is known outside the US, had gained popularity in Europe in the latter half of the 19th century, especially in England, where the English Football Association was founded in 1863. Football spread rapidly throughout the British Empire as the empire expanded, and reached East Africa by the late 1800s, with reports of games being played on Zanzibar by the late 1870s.[12] The British government maintained a largely skeletal colonial presence in East Africa until the turn of the century, but as the colonial state expanded, missionaries from the Church of Scotland began moving into the Kenyan hinterland in 1898.[13] Soccer spread rapidly alongside the spread of European control and the expansion of missionary influence, with soccer games reported in the border region between Uganda and Kenya as early as 1903. A report from that year by H.T.C. Weatherhead, a correspondent for *The African Standard*, describes a match between two townships, Iganga and Jinja as:

> the first real match amongst the natives …. The point of interest is in the fact that there seems to be a certain discipline at work for these men to learn to keep their places at football, and that some *esprit de corps* is engendered which is a great thing amongst naturally indolent people. Football may be a means of grace.[14]

Even in this early account, Weatherhead expresses a clear vision for football as a way of educating Africans, of teaching them a sense of grace or class through a medium they can understand. Grace here means "a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine assistance"—football can teach Africans how to become holy, the traits of Western culture that indicate civilization. And, though the two teams are described by Weatherhead as largely made up of Africans, several Englishmen played alongside them.[15] To colonists, soccer provided a cultural

[12] Alegi, *African Soccerscapes : How a Continent Changed the World's Game*, 6.
[13] Mählmann, "Sport As A Weapon Of Colonialism In Kenya: A Review Of The Literature," 158.
[14] H.T.C. Weatherhead, "Across the Lake: A Football Match," *The African Standard*, September 19, 1903, sec. Sports, African Newspapers.
[15] Ibid, 11.

bridge between European and African cultures, and allowed them to show the superiority of European life and culture. Football was not only present in early colonial Kenya, but it was politicized from its very beginnings.

As the British colonial presence spread rapidly, so too did their armies, and soldiers were often a key conduit for football. The King's African Rifles were an interracial military unit in East Africa, created in 1902 as a way for the British to maintain a military presence without having to devote large numbers of British troops—rank-and-file soldiers were largely Africans, drawn from autochthonous populations in modern day Tanzania, Kenya, and Malawi.[16] All the officers, however, were British, and this dichotomy posed a problem because of the sociopolitical and cultural differences between the two groups. European soldiers often looked down on their African counterparts, and regarded them as savages because of their lack of western education and "proper" manners. Football was introduced as a way to help bridge the gaps between the English and their African subjects, and to bring Africans into line with English moral standards and social practices. Football was encouraged from early on in the founding of the KAR, where it encouraged an *esprit de corps* amongst soldiers and allowed for safe challenges to authority and exertion of anger on the level playing field of the football pitch.[17]

But soccer was also meant to teach Africans about European ideas of citizenship and manhood. As Clayton states: "'Manliness' in this pattern of sport was seen as a useful outlet and an energy-consuming substitute for young empire-builders in achieving this second character-forming muscular Christian self-discipline."[18] Football, and sport more broadly, allowed the

[16] Hubert Moyse-Bartlett, *The King's African Rifles* (Gale & Polden, 1956).
[17] Anthony Clayton, "Sport and African Soldiers: The Military Diffusion of Western Sport throughout Sub-Saharan Africa," 118.
[18] Ibid, 116.

British to teach Kenyans what it meant to be a British soldier, and indeed a British citizen—strong, physical, and with a healthy respect for the rules.

In addition to the direct spread of football encouraged by British officers, the spread of the military necessitated the spread of railroads into the hinterlands, which indirectly spread soccer, too. Railroad workers and those who traveled on railroads spread football deep into the Kenyan interior, introducing the game to the frontier.[19] The military and the building of the infrastructure it needed was key to the spread of soccer in Kenya, and the sport was politicized because of both its association with the military as an institution and because of the way it was used as a tool by British officers and by the colonial administration.

Perhaps the most important tool for the spread of soccer in Kenya, however, was education and schools. Early education was largely done by missionaries from Britain, as the British colonial state was less interested in penetrating into the Kenyan interior and providing services. The first government-run school for Africans in Kenya was founded in the early 1900s, but it was closed shortly thereafter, and government spending on education for Africans remained pitiful until the 1920s.[20] Gradually the colonial state in Kenya became more and more interested in providing some kind of education for Africans, which was a result of several factors. It was partially the British belief in the "white man's burden"—there was a sense that the British ought to civilize Africans, and a key part of doing so was education. It was also partially due to pressure from outside sources—in 1924, the Phelps-Stokes Commission, an African-American run non-governmental organization focused on education in Africa; its report aimed to

[19] Alegi, *African Soccerscapes*, 6.
[20] Mählmann, "Sport As A Weapon Of Colonialism In Kenya: A Review Of The Literature," 159.

"present the conditions of Native education in East Africa, with suggestions for their improvement."[21] The commission demanded more funding for education, and argued that:

> recreation … has the responsibility of supplementing, and thereby developing, a more comprehensive physique and mind. … The emphasis already given to essentially Western games such as football is fully justified by their success in diversity the interest of the youth to more beautiful and healthful ideas.[22]

Even in 1922, when Frederick Lord Lugard wrote *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, he understood the importance of sport and education in building Africans' constitutions both physical and moral: "…cricket, football, and 'athletics' bring the staff and pupils into close touch, and have the best effect in training character."[23] Football was a tool of the colonial government and of the missionaries, used by them in their attempts to craft model Africans in the mold of English morality. But soccer took on a broader political life beyond the schools and the military through its associations with political institutions. For example, Hyder Kindy, a Kenyan of Indian descent living in Mombasa, described the politics of soccer in his 1972 autobiography *Life and Politics in Mombasa*: "Any player from one locality who joined another team was considered as having committed high treason. He would be isolated and no one would talk to him."[24] The politics of sport come to life.

The association between football and politics was tightened even more with Kenyan independence, as African nationalist politicians continued to use soccer as a political tool and stepping stone to further political success. Jomo Kenyatta, Kenya's first president, used soccer as a nation-building tool, in an attempt to create a pan-ethnic Kenyan national identity. On December 7, 1963, five days before Kenya was officially declared an independent state,

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[21] African Education Commission, "Education in East Africa," xiii.
[22] Ibid, 34.
[23] Frederick D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 435.
[24] Hyder Kindy, *Life and Politics in Mombasa*, 95.

Kenyatta organized the Kenya Independence Tournament, also known as the Uhuru (Freedom) Cup.[25] Kenya beat Tanganyika, tied Uganda, and beat Scotland Amateurs, a team composed of Scottish expatriates, to finish first in the tournament,[26] and set up what was supposed to be a great future for Kenyan football. In this tournament Kenyan nationhood was tied directly to Kenyan soccer. The tournament celebrated political freedom, yes, but also allowed Kenyans to come together around a sense of Kenyan-ness—the team played and beat some of their key local rivals, and even a team composed of citizens of the very nation that had colonized them. Kenyatta also assisted in the creation of the Jomo Boys Club, which was meant to "instill in the minds of players a sense of respect towards our beloved leader Mzee Jomo Kenyatta, and to foster a sense of oneness of all the peoples irrespective of their race, color or religion."[27] According to Kindy,

> He [Kenyatta] agreed with me that … sports play a very important role in Kenya in bringing together all tribes and races. The more people are brought together in such common pursuits, the more they will all feel they are members of a single nation.[28]

Though Kenyatta was seeking to create a different kind of identity from the model of European values employed by the British, based more on a sense of Kenyan-ness than on British views of citizenship, his policies reinforced the link between politics and football.

The politicization of football spread to the national stage, and emerged as a strategy for politicians to gain and maintain a base of support. Soccer provided access to an elite group of fans because of the ways it was introduced to Kenya. As in Nigeria and Ghana, where the sport was picked up by military elites, so too in Kenya it provided politicians like the scholarly

[25] "Kenya Independence Tournament (Uhuru Cup) 1963."
[26] Ibid.
[27] Kindy, *Life and Politics in Mombasa*, 105.
[28] Ibid, 106-107.

Kenyatta access to new groups.[29] In the 1960s and 70s, the clash between two football teams, Luo Union and Luo Sports, for access to the best Luo players reflected a bigger clash between Kenyatta's first vice president, Jaramogi Odinga, and a political rival, Tom Mboya, over representation of Luo voters.[30] Odinga backed Union, while Mboya backed Sports, and while the two clubs eventually merged to form Gor Mahia in 1968, this conflict is emblematic of a broader trend in Kenyan soccer towards politicization and the translation of political rivalries into sports contests. This pattern of politicians dipping their hands into football continued with Daniel arap Moi, the second president of Kenya. In order to prevent divides within the Kenyan identity and KANU itself, and as a policy of ethnic unity, Moi forced Gor Mahia and Abaluhya Football Club, another football team centered on the Luhya ethnic group, to change their names, becoming Gulf Olympic Rangers (GOR) and AFC Leopards, respectively.[31] Not only were such ethnic divisions problematic, but soccer supporters provided a deep base of support that might allow politicians to contest Moi's hold on power.[32] In fact, of 15 ministers of sport since 1963, two-thirds have gone on to hold some political office afterwards.[33]

Though the national team was used by both Kenyatta and Moi as a symbol for Kenya more broadly, domestic club football fractured the country, weakening the sense of Kenyan identity in the early years of independence. Football is political in Kenya not just because of its utility as a tool for identity creation, but also because politicians embrace it as a stepping stone for entrance onto the larger political stage. Soccer has become a political symbol not just as a

[29] Clayton, "Sport and African Soldiers," 132.
[30] Othieno Nyanjom and Africa Centre for Open Governance., *Foul Play! : The Crisis of Football Management in Kenya,* 14.
[31] Ibid, 15.
[32] Ibid, 15.
[33] Ibid, 18.

representation of a clash between two ethnic or political identities, but also because the fate of the game in Kenya has paralleled the fate of the Kenyan state and society at large.

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The game of soccer has been instrumental for creating community and a sense of nationhood. It is associated with the nation in Kenya because it was so instrumental to the foundation of various political institutions during the country's development in the colonial and immediate post-colonial periods. Soccer's connections to political institutions have meant that the language of soccer works as political subtext that may be intentionally invoked by the elite as a way to criticize or discuss politics and the fate of the nation, or that may be used unintentionally, as something that is reflective of Kenya as a whole and that is understood by most Kenyans to have broader implications. While there are other languages and symbols for power in Kenya, soccer is an interesting case because it is so universal, followed by such a high percentage of the Kenyan population. There is so much emotion and history tied up in soccer that talking about politics and corruption in soccer *has* to be meaningful.

Soccer is not the only example of such coded language in Kenya. In *Burying SM*, historians Cohen and Odhiambo examine the case of S.M. Otieno, a Kenyan businessman who died intestate, and the conflict between his Luo community and his Kikuyu wife over where he should be buried. Though the relatives never explicitly, openly discussed it, Cohen and Odhiambo argue that many Kenyans understood the case to actually be about the role of ethnicity in the postcolonial state and the impact of tribalism on Kenya.[34] Here the language is less coded and more of a metaphor, as Kenyans used a single domain, specifically the legal case

[34] David William Cohen and E.S. Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM*, Social History of Africa. (Heinemann; James Currey, 1992), 75.

over burial rights, to discuss the nature of the postcolonial society. It was a "brief but…significant moment in the construction of a Kenya [sic] nation…. The meanings of his body and life were magnified in contest."[35] For example, the food SM bought at his local market "exploded into discussions of the values of different sorts of food in Luo culture and in Kenyan national life and into considerations of the distinctions between values and behaviors posited as 'Luo' and those posited as 'Kenyan.'"[36] Kenyans used subsections of their culture as a way to discuss the issues facing their state at large.

Similarly, Luise White analyzes the invocation of vampires in rumors spread by Africans in colonial east Africa when discussing the powers of the white-controlled state. These rumors, White argues in *Speaking with Vampires*, have power that goes beyond the seeming content of any individual rumor because they are indicative of an attempt by Africans to understand and discuss colonial power; the rumors were spread and invoked both consciously and unconsciously because there was a shared understanding of their deeper meanings. She asserts that the rumors about vampires were explanations for a range of occurrences, including the disappearance of individuals from communities, European medical practices like vaccinations, and the presence of colonial officials in their towns.[37] Telling stories about vampirism was a way for Africans to understand and discuss the foreign and extractive nature of the colonial government through the language of a European literary trope. But this subtext was not necessarily conscious or even evident to those who spread the stories—it was the rumors themselves that had power: "people do not speak with truth, with a concept of the accurate description of what they saw, to say what they mean, but they construct and repeat stories that carry the values and meanings that most

[35] Ibid, 92.
[36] Ibid, 92.
[37] White, *Speaking with Vampires*,

forcibly get their points across."[38] White also argues that some element of the power of the stories came from the fact of their foreignness—that is, 'vampire' was a good way to describe non-African goings on because it was itself a non-African term.[39] Stories of vampires became stories of whites and criticisms of colonial power.

The idea that Africans feel they must be careful in criticizing state power was not just true in the colonial period. In many post-colonial African countries, the state has continued to be predatory and dangerous to those who might challenge it. Many Africanist scholars have studied Africans' discussions of corruption to understand aspects of African life. In *A Culture of Corruption*, Daniel Smith focuses on the complicity of Nigerians in the corruption of the system in which they live—most hate it, but many benefit from it, through patronage systems and other kickback mechanisms.[40] Smith tries to address corruption in Nigerian terms—corruption to Nigerians refers not only to bribes paid to politicians, but also "to a whole range of social behaviors in which various forms of morally questionable deception enable the achievement of wealth, power, or prestige as well as much more mundane ambitions."[41] And discussions of corruption are not just about finding blame for political or economic problems, but instead they act as more systematic explanations for the condition of Nigeria more broadly. But once again, many of these discussions about corruption criticize the state obliquely and focus less on confronting the state openly and more on understanding the ways in which the state has failed the broader population.

[38] Ibid, 31.
[39] Ibid, 5.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid, 5.

Why might such a coded language around soccer develop in Kenya in the postcolonial period? Since the late 60s and early 70s with the development of opposition parties like the Kenyan African Democratic Union (KADU) and the Kenyan People's Union (KPU), the Kenyan state has made a point to crackdown on dissidents and whistleblowers.[42] A notable example is the death of Tom Mboya, a Luo opposition leader who was killed under mysterious circumstances in 1969, with many commentators assuming that his death was orchestrated by the state under Jomo Kenyatta.[43][44] This culture of oppression carried through the presidency of Daniel arap Moi (Kenyatta's successor), from 1978 to 2002, with multiple (often unproven) allegations of murdering opposition politicians being linked to the ruling party.[45] Though Kenyans were hopeful that the election of a non-KANU president would cause a larger shift, Mwai Kibaki's regime was just as aggressive in pursuing political opponents when it came to power in 2002. Michela Wrong's *It's Our Turn to Eat* documents the life of John Githongo, Kenya's first anticorruption tsar and a major whistleblower, who was forced to hide from Kenyan secret agents tracking him in London.[46] Githongo feared for his life after exposing corruption at the highest levels of Kibaki's administration in 2006. This history of punishment for whistleblowers, combined with modern persecution has created a need in Kenya for a new language to discuss corruption at high levels. Football has become that language, a coded way to talk about things that are so sensitive and dangerous that they cannot be discussed openly.

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[42] Donald C. Savage, "Kenyatta and the Development of African Nationalism in Kenya," *International Journal* 25, no. 3 (1970): 518–37.
[43] "An Evening with Tom Mboya," Speeches, Lectures and Remarks from Prominent Personalities (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, 2006).
[44] Charles Mohr, "Corruption and Repression Mar the Success of Kenya," *The New York Times*, October 17, 1975, sec. Archives.
[45] Makau wa Mutua, "Human Rights and State Despotism in Kenya: Institutional Problems," *Africa Today* 41, no. 4 (1994): 50–56.
[46] Wrong, *It's Our Turn to Eat*.

Football is useful as a coded language because it is understood in Kenya to be one of the defining elements of the nation—that is, football offers a way to separate Kenyans from non-Kenyans, and to directly compare Kenya to other countries. Frequently, for example, the failures of the Kenyan soccer team are compared to the successes of regional and global rivals. These comparisons not only highlight where Kenya could do better, but also create a sense of community behind the team:

> Despite hefty sponsorship of the national team Harambee Stars by Kenya Breweries, our team was kicked out of the World Cup qualifiers, failed to appear at the Africa Nations Cup and has continued to perform dismally in East and Central Africa.[47]

The use of phrases like "our team," which includes the reader in the conversation, implements soccer as a way to define a larger community. As I have previously argued, football has been associated with political institutions since its introduction to Kenya, and was instrumental in developing a sense of both Kenyan subjectivity under British rule and of citizenship after independence. Football *is* political in Kenya—any discussion of football's successes and failures is laden with political subtext. When *The Daily Nation* writes that "Kenya stands no chance of making it to the greatest soccer show on earth"[48] in reference to the World Cup, the newspaper cannot help but be understood to be commenting on the failures of Kenya more broadly on the global stage. Or when they complain that "Our western rivals, Uganda, are not struggling to get sponsors. In fact, they are spoilt for choice with Airtel, Nile Special, NIC Bank and BUL coming on board,"[49] it must be understood as a comparison with its local rivals about more than just soccer. Though Uganda has a lower GDP per capita and lower levels of foreign direct investment, somehow they have managed to secure sponsors for their team, while Kenya cannot.

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[47] "KFF Team Deserved the Sack," *Daily Nation*, May 19, 2002.
[48] Elias Makori, "KFF's Selfishness Hurting Soccer," *Daily Nation*, May 25, 2002.
[49] "EDITORIAL: Team's Situation a Shame," *Daily Nation*, October 8, 2018.

While Kenya has long been the main success story in East Africa, Tanzania and Uganda are rising quickly. In 2015, for example, the amount of foreign direct investment inflows to Tanzania increased by 72% from 2014 to $1.78 billion.[50] Kenya and Tanzania are currently in a trade war, imposing high tariffs on goods like flour, gas, and baked goods, and competing for the development of the biggest port in East Africa.[51][52] Football is political in Kenya because of its history in the country and in the region, and because of the way political writers and commentators continues to speak about it today.

But the political subtext in football discussions is delivered in the language of football. Football is invoked by Kenyans, consciously or unconsciously, to discuss corruption and politics, and can be used to study the condition of postcolonial Kenyan society more broadly. The discussion itself has power, whether or not those who are reading the stories and joining the conversation understand the full subtext. And soccer provides a non-African language for discussing a non-African problem. Corruption is a somewhat foreign concept to Africans and Kenyans—traditional practices like patronage networks and gift exchanges only came to be considered negative and discussed in terms of corruption when Europeans arrived and imposed new political systems.[53] Football offers a Western language to understand a Western problem facing Kenyan society. Kenyans' discourses around corruption in soccer "reflect a popular expectation that things could and should be different."[54] It is not just that corruption is hurting the state, but that the state is letting people down that is at the heart of these discussions.

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[50] "Tanzania," U.S. Department of State, accessed December 2, 2018.
[51] Dominic Omondi, "Will There Be a Winner in Kenya's Economic War with Tanzania?," *The Standard*, accessed December 2, 2018.
[52] "The Race to Become East Africa's Biggest Port," June 7, 2016, sec. Africa.
[53] Daniel Jordan Smith. *A Culture of Corruption*. Princeton University Press, 2007,
[54] Ibid, 87

Football is also useful as a coded language because its fate neatly parallels the fate of the Kenyan state, and because the problems facing the sport today are the same as those facing the country more broadly. Kenya has been heavily fractured by tribalism since it gained independence, but especially so since the 2002 election, the first fully open elections in Kenya, when the ruling Kenya African National Union party (the party that had ruled since independence) was defeated by Mwai Kibaki's opposition party. Though the 2002 election was fairly peaceful, ethnic tensions mounted after Kibaki's election, and rapidly began boiling over. The 2007 election was marred by violence along ethnic lines after Raila Odinga, a Luo politician challenged Kibaki, a Kikuyu, and claimed victory, though he in fact lost.[55]

Kenya has also faced huge problems of corruption since it gained independence from the British. Its first two presidents, Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi both ran states based on patronage networks that effectively exempted themselves and those in favor from taxes, and offered promotions in exchange for favors.[56] Corruption today remains incredibly widespread—Kenya is one of the most corrupt countries in Africa, and in 2016 it ranked 145th on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, below Nigeria, Russia, and Pakistan.[57] Kenyan politicians have adopted a new language to talk about the kick-backs and patronage they expect from higher ups of the same ethnic groups: they refer to it as 'eating,' and they say that politicians and others are being 'fed' by this corruption.[58]

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[55] Jeffrey Gettleman, "Disputed Vote Plunges Kenya Into Bloodshed," *The New York Times*, December 31, 2007, sec. Africa.
[56] John Githongo, "STATE OF THE NATION: Corruption: A Brief History – 1997 to 2018," *The E Review* (blog), May 12, 2018.
[57] "Corruption Perceptions Index 2016."
[58] Wrong, *It's Our Turn to Eat.*

This culture of corruption was supposed to change with the 2002 elections. Kibaki campaigned on an anti-corruption platform, vowing to make the issue his "first priority."[59] Despite the fact that nearly $240 million was stolen by officials in Moi's government in the weeks before the election, Kenyans were among the most hopeful populations about the future of their country in 2003.[60] But over the next several years Kibaki failed to deliver on his promises, and proved to be just as corrupt as his predecessors, as were Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta, who were elected after him in 2013. 2002 is perhaps the most important political date in Kenyan history since independence, as it marked freedom from single party rule and the potential for the development of an independent democracy free from corruption. The popular disgust about political corruption at the time of the 2002 election was mirrored by a major corruption scandal in soccer, and just as Kenyans were disappointed by the failures of their state to correct its course, so too were they angry with the fate of their soccer team, which seemed posed to make a mark on the international stage.

Football fans were initially hopeful for the future of the sport after independence. Prior to independence in 1964, Kenya had won the Gossage Cup, a regional tournament between Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika, and Zanzibar, 11 times, and then Kenya won it another three times in the seven years after 1964.[61] They dominated other African teams at the Uhuru Cup, played to celebrate Kenya breaking free from the United Kingdom, going undefeated and winning all but one match by a total combined score line of 10-5.[62] But things went downhill from there—in the 54 years since independence, Kenya has won the successor to the Gossage Cup, the Council for East and Central African Football Associations (CECAFA) Cup, only seven times; it has

[59] Adrian Blomfield, "Kibaki Vows to Purge Kenya of Corruption," December 30, 2002, sec. World.
[60] Ibid. & Wrong, *It's Our Turn to Eat*, 7.
[61] "East and Central African Championship (CECAFA)."
[62] "Kenya Independence Tournament (Uhuru Cup) 1963."

qualified for the African Cup of Nations only five times, never advancing beyond the first round; and it has never appeared at the World Cup. These football failures were due in large part to corruption and tribalism that fractured the national team and weakened the youth development soccer setup. In addition, because the rise of international television allowed Kenyans to support and follow non-Kenyan club teams, as their disgust with their own teams has risen, they have become less invested in the sport in their own country.[63] Despite these failures, Kenyans have remained hopeful about the future of soccer, especially when the country was given the opportunity to host the African Cup of Nations in 1996, though this was later revoked due to a lack of adequate stadia.[64] There was hope among fans that in the new millennium Kenyan soccer could rise again to the peaks of the 1950s and '60s, and the problems facing the sport could be diagnosed and solved.

These hopes were quickly squashed. In 2002, the head of the Kenyan Football Federation (KFF), Maina Kariuki, and two of his top assistants, Hussein Swaleh and Mohammed Hatimy were involved in the biggest corruption scandal in Kenyan soccer history. Kariuki was elected in 2000, and was removed from office in 2002 after the KFF was dissolved. Kariuki, Swaleh, and Hatimy stole one million Kenyan shillings, roughly $18,000, in gate receipts from a match against Swaziland, paid out large sums of money to themselves and other members of the administration, and rejected financial accountability guidelines proposed by eight of the largest Premier League teams.[65] All three men were charged with the theft of 55 million Kenyan shillings in 2004, and the government took steps to stop the corruption by ordering a mandatory

[63] Nyanjom and Africa Centre for Open Governance., *Foul Play! : The Crisis of Football Management in Kenya*, 15-16.
[64] Ibid, 20.
[65] Ibid, 21-27.

financial report.[66] Despite the fact that Kariuki, Hatimy, and Swaleh had all been barred for life from managing soccer, Hatimy was appointed to run the KFF after the new chairman was removed by FIFA. Finally, in 2008, the KFF managed remove Hatimy from his position—in response, however, Hatimy founded his own football management organization, Football Kenya Limited (FKL).[67]

Both football management organizations claimed to administer the Kenyan Premier League, and more importantly the national team, the Harambee Stars. After a series of lawsuits and appeals, FIFA unregistered the KFF as the official soccer federation for Kenya in 2009. The KFF appealed the decision again, this time to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), with the backing of the President Mwai Kibaki's regime, but despite Hatimy's history of corruption, CAS dismissed the case, effectively ruling in favor of the FKL.[68] In 2012, however, the organization underwent another shift, and the name changed once again, to the Football Kenya Federation (FKF), which is the official body recognized to manage football in Kenya.[69] This story may seem exceptional, but it is part of a greater legacy of corruption and mismanagement. What was different about the KFF scandal, however, is that it happened in the public eye, and provoked great outrage amongst Kenyans—and it allowed Kenyans to discuss corruption in soccer as a way of discussing corruption in the state more broadly.

Though Kenyans wanted to challenge and tackle the problems facing their country—both in politics and in soccer—in the early 2000s, they could not have open discussions of high level corruption for fear that they might be silenced or persecuted by the government. The

[66] Ibid, 29.
[67] Ibid, 30.
[68] "Kenya Football Dispute Resolved."
[69] "Out Goes Football Kenya Limited (FKL) in Comes Football Kenya Association (FKA), New Constitution within 90 Days."

development of coded languages to discuss politics or societal forces rests on the fact that open discussions of those issues is either prohibited or dangerous. In *Speaking with Vampires*, for example, White argues that the rumors she discusses "are narratives, explanations, and theories in which colonial bureaucracies, corporations, events, and diseases are subjects."[70] These narratives not only explain things that Africans do not fully understand, but also offer protection from them—both from the 'vampires' and the colonial state itself. Similarly, after Kenyan independence discussions of tribes and ethnicity were banned by the government, since they were seen to fracture Kenya. Thus the language used by Kenyans to discuss the burial of S.M. Otieno was about protecting themselves from punishment from the government while still conveying an important debate about ethnicity.[71]

When discussing the problems facing Kenyan soccer, the newspaper writers often address problems that the state is facing: soccer offers a veil of protection for political discussions that might otherwise be prohibited. The problems they attribute to football management are the same problems that face Kenya as a whole. As the editorial board of *The Daily Nation* writes: "The history of football management in Kenya has long been the story of sloth, greed, tribalism, politics and sheer incompetence."[72] They also blame corrupt individuals for the problems facing the team, not the institutions or organizations themselves:

> The individuals who run football have time and time again proved that they have absolutely no idea of how to manage any organisation and, worse, that they have not the slightest respect for the rules and conventions that govern sport.[73]

[70] White, 82.
[71] Cohen and Odhiambo, *Burying SM*.
[72] "KFF Should Feel Ashamed."
[73] Ibid.

The way that Kenyans talk about corruption in the soccer team in the recent past reflects a disappointment about this culture of corruption:

> There is absolutely zero the Kariuki team can show for the $250,000 (nearly Sh20 million) provided by Fifa for the National Youth Development Programme. All we saw were resignations by coaches, including a German expert seconded to the KFF.[74]

This 2002 editorial written just before the elections reflects a disgust with the embezzlement, and with the waste of investment in Kenyan soccer. The effects attributed to this corruption are often problems facing everyday Kenyans: "the game continues to suffer. National team coach Reinhard Fabisch's salary remains unpaid and Harambee Stars players stay hungry."[75] Everyday Kenyans often go unpaid or hungry because they are unable to bribe their way into higher positions with better pay. Corruption and tribalism are not just bad because they lower the standing of Kenya on the world stage, but because they hurt Kenyan citizens.

But the hopefulness of Kenyans about their future is also reflected in these editorials and op-eds—soccer is a coded language that allows them to discuss not just the problems but also the solutions. For example, many of the pieces written in 2002 reflect a desire to hold safe and fair elections to fix the KFF. 2002 was also the year of Kenya's first free and fair elections since its independence, and the first time when a non-KANU candidate stood a real shot at winning. Mwai Kibaki's campaign promised a shift from the old guard, an attempt to reform the culture of corruption that developed under Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi. Newspaper editorials that are about football call for the hiring of legitimate officials, who are actually interested in fixing things, rather than performing for a bribe or as a tool for their own betterment: "We must get rid of those who are in soccer administration for the money, for self-aggrandisement, and as a

[74] "KFF Team Deserved the Sack."
[75] Makori, "KFF's Selfishness Hurting Soccer."

stepping stone to politics."[76] They say that "…the Government should ensure that elections are held and a new and a more competent team installed to run soccer."[77] These articles are certainly about fixing the KFF, but written seven months before the general election they are also about how to fix Kenya's problems, about what political changes can make Kenya live up to its citizens' expectations. With the political disappointments following the 2002 election, however, by 2006 the writers' tones have changed as they write (superficially) about soccer: they no longer are calling for elections but for a more executive, less democratic solution: they want "an independent and properly-constituted association recognised by Fifa must regain the management of soccer."[78] By this time, Kibaki's regime had proved itself to be no better than arap Moi's, plagued by the same corruption and dysfunctionality. The problems that newspaper commentators once thought could be blamed on bad individuals now seem to be more systematic, more bound up in the institutions that govern. After the KFF was banned by FIFA, the *Daily Nation* wrote:

> Now it seems that Fifa itself has seen the light and concluded that the Kenya Football Federation is an incorrigible organisation. [The] KFF is being asked to reform itself. We don't, in all honesty, see that happening. … [Change] will not happen until we have the right organisation and the right individuals in place to run soccer.[79]

Having given officials so much time to change, Kenyans were frustrated that none had occurred. This frustration has persisted, as time and again the 'new hopes' for Kenyan football are exposed to be just as corrupt and inept as their predecessors.

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[76] Ibid.
[77] "KFF Team Deserved the Sack."
[78] "This Ban Was Long Overdue," *Daily Nation*, October 26, 2006.
[79] Ibid.

Interestingly, football is also used by opposition politicians to gain popular support. Politicians decry the same problems as the editorial writers at newspapers: bad management and corruption are "killing the dreams of many talented young people," according to former president Raila Odinga in a forward to a biography written in 2015. This is true not just for footballers, but for Kenyans everywhere. Soccer is a political language, but also a political tool: politicians like Odinga want to use it to "employ many of our young people locally and abroad,"[80] and others like Joe Kadenge see it as a way to promote "social change in order to impart key values and principles that will help us achieve prosperity in general for this nation."[81] Political leaders often hold rallies in football stadiums before games and big elections—the game provides an open and ready base of supporters, essentially a captive audience.[82][83] It allows politicians to associate themselves with a good in their life, with something their constituents are passionate about. Football is a symbol for politics in Kenya, and also a political tool for Kenyan politicians.

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Football was introduced to Kenya, and to Africa more broadly, as a way to condition a new set of colonial subjects. Brought over by missionaries, teachers, soldiers, and railway men, the game took off in schools and the military, where it was meant to instill in Kenyans a set of European morals and values, grace and Christian manliness. It was picked up by Kenyan nationalists like Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi in the movement for independence, and was celebrated as a way to bring the country together, to develop a sense of Kenyan nationhood behind the national football team. Inside the country, however, it became a site of ethnic conflict,

[80] Nene, *Joe Kadenge : The Life of a Football Legend : A Biography*, vii.
[81] Ibid, 300.
[82] "Final Rallies for Kenya Poll Rivals."
[83] "Jubilee Supporters Throng Afraha Stadium for Final Rally."

where politicians leveraged fan bases to their own advantage, and where corruption was rampant. Football's history in Kenya in the colonial and early post-colonial periods associated it with politics inside Kenya, and made it fertile ground for development as a coded language.

That language has developed, especially since 2002, when a corruption scandal and the election of Mwai Kibaki were supposed to bring about change for both soccer and Kenya as a whole. The problems facing Kenyan soccer are the same as those facing the state, and when Kenyans talk about soccer, they are talking about politics. The game is inherently political in Kenya, and commentary on it is also commentary on the larger issues of corruption and ethnic conflict facing the country. In this way, football is a coded language for politics, regardless of whether it is invoked intentionally or not, and the aspirations of Kenyans for the future of their country can be seen there. Football is important not only because it has captured the collective imagination of Kenyans, but because it is a place where Kenyans can discuss the problems facing their country, where they can openly talk about what comes next.

This essay has been limited by the scope of evidence available, and many questions remain open. Some of them, which I have addressed earlier, have to do with broadening the diversity of this study—is soccer used in the same way by all Kenyans, or are there differences across age, gender, and class? Is football used in the same way in other African countries, or only Kenya? Others are more difficult to answer: are Kenyans intentionally invoking football as a way of communicating about corruption and politics, or is it purely unintentional? And if it is unknowing, how do we as historians understand these actions? How do we know that these coded languages are not just made up by us as an interesting aspect of post-colonial society? These questions challenge not just the history I have written here, but also a much larger historiography, and may have implications for African history as a field.

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