

# Radio Soccer Commentary as Reconstruction and Performance of Political and Social-cultural Reality: The Case of Kenya in the 1980s

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This paper has developed the argument that live radio soccer commentary (LRSC) is a representation of soccer match events at one level but a performance of dominant socio-cultural and political trends of the societies at another level that produce and consume them. This echoes Reaser's (2003) and Ryan's (1993) perceptions of sports announcer's talk as a complex performance form based on but not limited to the "verbal imitation" of live sport events. We have understood the performativity of the LRSCs in the light of Schechner's (2006) emphasis of what he termed "restored behaviour" in understanding performance. In our context, we have treated the interpenetration of Kenyan soccer, politics, and society as the "restored behaviour" upon which the script of the LRSCs are based. The methodological apparatus of this paper is largely qualitative, consisting in the critical analysis of audio-recordings of Kenyan LRSCs. Focus is made on the Kenyan society of the 1980s, an era perceived to have been characterized by a close interaction between soccer, society, and politics. The analysis is informed by Fabian's (1997) inter-textual approach to the "reading" and interpretation of performance texts. This approach seems to echo a wider discourse of the social nature of media-text interpretation that has been proposed by Burn and Parker (1985). Conclusions drawn from the analysis reveal what Muponde and Zegeye (2011) had described as a soccer "ecosystem" involving soccer as a sport, and the socio-cultural realities of its immediate context. This paper has argued that LRSC is one of the channels through which this ecosystem is expressed.

*Keywords:* live radio soccer commentary (LRSC), oral performance, nationalism

## Introduction

This paper examines the practice of live radio soccer commentary (LRSC) as a media practice that flourished during the 1980s in Kenya as a result of specific political and socio-cultural realities of the time. It is a practice that is not unique to the Kenyan society of the 1980s. Nevertheless, this paper has argued that a distinct mode of LRSC developed in this period, whose structure and texture are largely influenced by the Kenyan politics and society of the 1980s. The methodological approach is based on retrieving and listening to recordings of a sample of the LRSC that is available on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) audio archives. It must be noted that the material in question is over 25 years old, and only the various structural changes of accidental survivals have taken place at KBC. It can be termed accidental because prior to the LRSC recordings were not considered as important data and most of it was lost or damaged. Secondly, the quality of

the information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure of the 1980s in Kenya was not as advanced as it is currently, since everything was stored in the analogue format. Nevertheless, the data used in this paper demonstrate recurrent patterns that could be perceived as a representation of LRSC of the 1980s.

The basic theoretical assumption of this paper is that LRSC is an oral performance. The paper particularly pegs its arguments on Schechner's (2006) concept of "restored behaviour" in performance (p. 29). Schechner has defined "restored behaviour" as physical, verbal, or virtual actions that "are not for the first time" and whose performances give the impression that they have been rehearsed. Implied in this is the concept of the "script", the understanding that performances are not spontaneous but informed by an underlying code known to the performer and his/her audience.

The notion of the "underlying script" of the LRSC echoes Muponde and Zegeye's (2011) understanding of soccer as, "a system of networks and expressions that are more likely to be considered as a tradition... shored up by soccer lore, a cache of practices, gestures, symbols, and soccer-ways that regulate and enable football" (p. 261). This paper argues that the "scriptedness" of LRSC performances renders them unique across space and time. It is in this sense that the LRSC of Kenya in the 1980s has been perceived as unique performances that can be interpreted against the background of their immediate political and socio-cultural contexts. We have also explored the subversive elements within these supposed master-narratives of the Kenyan society of the 1980s, in line with Muponde and Muchemwa's (2011) argument that soccer provides space for the insertion and proliferation of symbols that carry often contested politics and narratives (p. 280). These, in a sense, constitute the script of the LRSC. To "read" and understand this script, one has to also have information on the sources of what Muponde and Muchemwa (2011) have termed the symbols and narratives of soccer. This is what the next section of this paper is devoted to doing.

### **Kenya in the 1980s**

It is important to highlight some of the significant markers of the Kenyan society of the 1980s, since we have argued that they inform the scripts of the LRSC performances. In February 1982 the Kenyan constitution was amended to make Kenya a single party state. The ruling party, Kenya African National Union (KANU) therefore became synonymous with the government. The socio-economic and political framework of the day was captured in Judith Abwunza's (1990) quotation of the President's assertion thus, "There are three important factors in the Kenyan style of nation-building: the vehicle, the force, and the philosophy. KANU is the vehicle, Nyayo is the moving spirit or force, and Nyayoism is the philosophy" (p. 183). KANU, which in full stands for Kenya African National Union is a political party, the party that formed the independence government in 1964. In February 1982, the Kenyan constitution was amended to make Kenya a single party state. This was a mere formalization of the single-party rule since in 1969 Kenyan People's Union (KPU), the opposition party had been banned, making KANU the only party.

Nyayo, a Kiswahili word for "footsteps" was a political ideology adopted by President Moi to develop a sense of continuity from the earlier governance structure that has been put in place in the Kenyatta Presidency; creating the impression that his leadership would directly follow from his predecessor's. However, Barkan and Chege (1989) had argued that the actual experience of Nyayo as a mode of governance unfolded within a few months when it became apparent from President Moi's policies and actions that the "footsteps" to be followed were his own (p. 436).

In August 1982, perhaps due to the perceived authoritarian style of President Moi's rule there was an

attempted coup. The coup had been organized by a section part of the military force drawn from the Air Force but was quashed within hours and order was restored. Nevertheless, it is probable that the Moi Presidency was shaken up by this event and put on guard, for it was now evident that there existed elements of dissent within the nation, and that President Moi had to do something about this situation. Commenting on this coup Bakari had observed:

It spurred Moi to reinvent himself as a confident politician who was his own man... the suppression of the coup restored a measure of confidence in Moi and he gradually consolidated his power and became a fully-fledged autocrat who totally dominated the political scene. (2002, p. 273)

Ogot and Ochieng (1995) had observed that President Moi's leadership at this time was based on an invocation of the basic element of populism, 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. The president was to be seen to be in charge the people following him.

The 1980s Kenyan society had also witnessed a rejuvenated spirit of soccer in the country. Indeed, this era has been described as "the golden era of Kenyan soccer". Gor Mahia and AFC Leopards, Kenya's all time most popular clubs, were at their peak during this era. The two are community clubs that largely represent the Luo and Luhya ethnic groups respectively. As it has been argued in Waliaula (2011), the two clubs are in one sense symbols around the ethnic identities of Luo and Luhya which are performed and contested (p. 84). One can argue that even in the present times AFC Leopards and Gor Mahia are the equivalent of the nodes that connected soccer to the Kenyan society of the 1980s; since they basically represent ethnic interests in a country where the interplay between ethnic and national identity has always been at the core of the socio-cultural and political reality. There has always been a fine balance between the two, which is every now and then disturbed, particularly during political contests of national elections.

This paper has argued that President Moi used the patronage of Kenya's largely ethno-centric soccer to achieve self-reinvention, since it enabled him to endear himself to the masses and at the same time allow them to express their ethnic identities in soccer-ways. However, it is important to observe that, as it has been observed by Muponde and Muchemwa (2011) the symboling of soccer-ways is dynamic (p. 280). In the Kenyan case President Moi had realized much earlier that the symbols of ethnic identity that were performed in Kenyan soccer were a subversion of the state nationalism script that he aimed to inscribe in the performance of soccer cultures. Therefore, in 1980, when he outlawed all tribal associations he also outlawed the ethnic naming of soccer clubs, which mainly targeted what was then Abaluhya Football Club, Luo Union, Maragoli United, and Gor Mahia (Waliaula, 2011, p. 85). However, as Muponde and Muchemwa (2011) had observed, the signs that play out in soccer-ways can only be regulated up to a point, beyond which they acquire a life of their own in performance; performances that include both conformist and subversive signs (p. 279).

It is also important to note that the Kenyan soccer-ways of the 1980s used radio as an expressive medium, basically due to the fact that this medium was the most effective and most popular at the time. Similarly, the president may have appropriated this popular space to perform the power and legitimacy of his government over the people, which seems to have been the basic characteristic of Kenyan radio in the 1980s, as it has been observed by Gathigi (2009), Ligaga (2009), and Odhiambo (2008, 2007). Significantly, this character of radio practice is not unique to the Kenyan society of the 1980s; Spitulnik (2008) had observed that radio in Africa has always situated itself within culturally specific encounters and sets of social relations (p. 147).

However, as it has been observed by Ligaga (2009), the Kenyan radio cultures of the 1980s may have been restricted to the performance of the nationalist script as it was inscribed by the government of the day, but the scripts also included elements of subversion and interrogation of the “official narrative” (p. 1). The next section of this paper examines how LRSC provided an ideal opportunity for the inscription of ethnic and personal narratives in Kenyan radio that acted as alternative voices to the state nationalism narrative.

### **Performing the Narrative of the Nation**

It is important to reiterate the point that in the Kenyan society of the 1980s the concept of the nation was in a way intertwined with President Moi, KANU, and Nyayo. These existed as symbols of nationhood and a performance of the narrative of the nation was hinged on them. LRSC performances were 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 Sambbrero 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 August 9, 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. This “realist” introduction 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 Kenyan life. This is an argument that echoes Anchimbe’s (2008) 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 (pp. 133-142).

Most important though is that the introduction 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 of time become so identified with him that 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 a 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 he absent may also be interpreted as defiance to the power of the president. It is worth noting that this political power play is worked into the commentary in a way that does not 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”. Ngalu (1987) had 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 (pp. 523-525). Barkan and Chege (1989) have traced the Harambee practice to the Kenyatta era and also emphasized 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.

It is also important to note that the LRSC had a structure that was in a sense modeled on Kenyan conventional public political functions that were presided over by the president. In this way, the way the political agenda was grafted on the football agenda created a symbiotic equation in a way.

Kenyan radio soccer commentators transferred this ritual performance of the state even when they covered matches outside Kenya, as is the case with Leonard Mambo Mbotela's coverage of a match between AFC Leopards of Kenya and Dynamos of Zimbabwe that was played in Harare.

Kwa hivi sasa, yaonekana ya kwamba, waziri mkuu, mheshimiwa, Bwana, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, Naam, ndiye huyo, Anaingia katikati ya kiwanja hivi sasa, Ikiwa mbele kuna mapikipiki kama manane hivi, Na magari yale ya polisi yanayomsindikiza. Vile vile atafika hapa katika uwanja, Rais wa inji ya Zimbabwe, Mheshimiwa, Reverend, Bwana, Banana. Yeye akiwa ndiye rais.

At this point, it looks like, the Prime Minister, Honourable, Mr. Robert Gabriel Mugabe, Yeaah, there he is, He is now making his way to the centre of the pitch, In front of him are about four motor cycles, And the police chase cars escorting him, Also we expect the arrival in this stadium, of the president of Zimbabwe, Honourable, Reverend, Mr. Banana, He is the president.

We notice that both the then Zimbabwean Prime Minister, Robert Mugabe and the president Banana are introduced in a way that echoes their power and influence. The commentator describes the ritual entry of Mugabe to the centre of the football pitch. President Banana is yet to arrive but his name is announced. The researcher has tried to capture the actual speech of the commentator, and it reveals a deliberate use of dramatic pause and what Heron (1976, pp. 12-15) in reference to Okot P' Bitek's poetry—termed as “apostrophe”.

Whereas this paper limits its focus on the Kenyan context, it is evident that political leaders of other African countries appropriated the football space to popularize themselves to the people. It is important to note that radio was the main medium outlet in the African societies of the 1980s, and thus an important tool for mediatizing sport. We can argue that African leaders took advantage of this to forge a sense of nationhood, which in their case revolved around themselves as icons of the state.

### **Performing Ethnic Identity**

As earlier mentioned, 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 LRSC and in the sub-narratives that are performed during the opening session, the half-time interval, and at the point of closure. Considering this clip from the LRSC of a match between Gor Mahia vs. Kenya Breweries match played on December 3rd, 1989 in Nyayo National Stadium:

... 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 Dawooo! 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 outb 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 first 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 they 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. Giulianotti (1999) had argued that the most committed and passionate fans believe that the support for their teams is meaningful to their concept of self-identity (pp. 30-32).

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 which were not community based above others, such as Kenya Breweries for instance. 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 Schreiber (2009) in his analysis of the performance of German soccer commentary in the Bundesligakonferenz. He observed:

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. (pp. 1-2)

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 LRSC, comparable to the performance of ethnic identity in the Kenyan context.

In this sense, the LRSC became a space where the tension between national and ethnic interests would be played out and resolved. Bhabha (1995) had observed that this is the reality of the third world post-colonial condition (p. 299). He argued that the post-colonial nation state is internally marked by cultural differences which must be allowed to play out. In the Kenyan context of the 1980s, the Moi presidency blocked most of the channels of the expression of these cultural differences. Nevertheless, community soccer clubs were appropriated and instrumentalized into cultural locations where ethnic identity would be performed. It is also important to note that as it has been observed by Spear (2003), in post-colonial African societies' ethnic cultural groups should be perceived not as complete and rigid structures but as deliberately mobilized and performed practices (pp. 3-27). We argue that soccer is one of those mobilizing instruments that were used in Kenya in the 1980s to construct and perform ethnic identity.

### **Performing Narratives 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 Abaluhya Football Club Leopards—mainly abbreviated as AFC Leopards—of Kenya and Power Dynamos of Zimbabwe played in Harare, Zimbabwe on March 13, 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, Leonard 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 Barber’s (2007) 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” (p. 104). 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, the Kenyan public. It was ideally a single narrative of the political power, authority to govern and inform its people. However, as Muponde and Muchemwa (2011) have argued, the LRSC space is organized around the liberal structure of the soccer-ways, operates beyond the policing of authority, and flows with the rhythm of the “battles” on the pitch and on the terraces. When the president chooses this space to perform power and authority, he inadvertently also chooses to contest and share his power with other voices, voices that much inferior to him. Such voices would, in ordinary circumstances, be muted and/or ignored.

### Conclusions

The Kenyan society of the 1980s was largely dominated by a governance structure deliberately designed to consolidate power in the presidency while at the same time cultivating and sustaining a strong sense of legitimacy and popularity with the people. To achieve this end most of the socio-cultural aspects of life were instrumentalized in ways that corresponded to political expedience (Kagwanja, 2005, pp. 51-75). Nevertheless, we have argued that as a socio-cultural instrument LRSC was flexible enough to accommodate the inscription and performance of a multiplicity of symbols of power.

The performance of the Kenyan nation in the 1980s is embedded in the performance of the supremacy of the president and this is worked into radio production too. As result, the structure of the LRSC is inevitably configured to feature the president, whose power is played out within other symbols that collectively construct the nation. In the context of the soccer matches, the president is “inserted” within the invocation and celebration of the (Kenyan) space in which the soccer match events are located, the vivid description of fan attendance on the terraces and the preamble activities. In this sense, he is elevated to the position of the main player in the match, who plays his “football” on the terraces and is cheered by his “fellow fans”. These fans are a symbolic representation of the public and when their cheers of approval are aired on radio the main target is the larger Kenyan public that listen to LRSC. The impression created is that of a very popular leader.

However, the LRSC also enables the fans to play their ethnic identities. Indeed, the tenor of the commentator responds to the strong ethnic force to the point that he, perhaps unconsciously, takes the side of the dominant ethnic community team, as is evident in the case of the Gor Mahia vs. Kenya Breweries match above-mentioned. It is significant that the location of the play of ethnic identity within the soccer space also leaves it open to contest. This echoes Muponde and Zegeye’s (2011) observation that the essence of soccer is that “the ball is round” and the outcome can go either way (p. 261). It is also significant that the LRSC overtly casts the commentator as the main performer but in essence he shares his space with the fans, as is evident in the “opinion and greetings” sessions we have explored. These allow the fans to perform their personhood in socio-culturally sanctioned ways. In the Kenyan case of the 1980s, the “salaams” tradition characterized by the broadcasting of greetings was a socially accepted and very popular practice. The flexibility of soccer-ways is such that the practice is accommodated within the LRSC. Ultimately, the LRSC treats us to a complex performance of significant political and socio-cultural practices of its context.

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