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Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies, 33(2-3)

ISSN

0041-5715

Author

Sortijas, Steve

Publication Date

2007

DOI

10.5070/F7332-3016483

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Tanzania's New National Stadium and the Rhetoric of Development

Steve Sortijas

This paper looks at current discourse on Tanzania's new National Stadium and situates it in the context of Tanzania's aspirations in the realms of international football and international development. The new National Stadium, built in part with foreign aid, is generally depicted as a marker for the promise of Tanzania's development. I argue that the new Stadium's "hidden discourse" provides an opportunity for Tanzania's politicians to reconfigure certain terms of Tanzanian citizenship, which embraces both old and new rhetoric on development.

On October 4, 2006, American rapper Jay-Z arrived in Dar es Salaam on the first stop in the African leg of his "Water for Life" world tour and performed in what was described in the local papers as "the biggest hip hop concert ever" in Tanzania (Tambwe 2006). Four days later, on October 8, the Tanzanian National Football Team battled to a draw against Mozambique in a qualifying match for the African Cup of Nations tournament – their first game since beating more highly-regarded Burkina Faso in a stunning victory that had reignited the national imagination after over 25 years of international football disappointment. I would not be in Dar es Salaam long enough to witness this remarkable stretch of five days in October, but it was not hard to sense the magnitude of these events. In the weeks preceding, the city's radio stations seemed to alternate between sports talk pundits plotting Tanzania's strategies for the upcoming football match and the continuous airplay of hits from the Jay-Z canon. Looking back on these five days in October, it appears that the true significance of these two seemingly unrelated events was that both provided opportunities for Tanzanians to exercise national pride and to ponder their place in the world.

To viewers in the West, Jay-Z's visit to Africa gave substance to his personal efforts to raise money and awareness about what he terms a "water crisis" in the developing world. In addition to Tanzania he would also tour in Angola, Nigeria, and South Africa with his experience relayed to Western audiences in the MTV documentary: "The Diary of Jay-Z: Water for Life." While his humanitarian work would position him to achieve Bono-like status in the rarified celebrity/ambassador category in the West, for Tanzanian audiences, Jay-Z was probably more akin to the second coming of Muhammad

Ali. Like Ali before him, Jay-Z is imbued with a mythical status as a black role model at the top of his craft. In prefacing his performance of his hit "Hard Knock Life," he evoked a strong reaction from the Tanzanian crowd by drawing from hip hop's increasingly universal vocabulary of scratching and surviving in relating his own past struggles with poverty and hope to what he witnessed in Tanzania. He also created common ground with the audience by performing alongside Tanzania's local hip hop artists and by wearing clothing by Tanzanian designers. Much to the audience's delight, by sharing the stage he had affirmed Tanzania's place on the international stage.

In the weeks before the national team's match against Mozambique, their victory over Burkina Faso had continued to provide fodder for a parallel discussion about the long-awaited emergence of Tanzania on the international scene. To put this victory into context, Tanzania has not qualified for the African Nations Cup tournament since 1982 and prior to this victory it had lost 10 straight competitive matches. For some observers, the upset over Burkina Faso was the sign of a new era in Tanzanian sports, with applause directed as much to Tanzania's politicians as for the players and coaches themselves. One post-match account reads: "For many years in Tanzania our leaders spoke about sports development but it was more theoretical than tangible. There are different ways that we, as a nation, can help our President and the nation at large to improve sports performance. For instance, we can urge local government to start sports programmes at local community, district, region and national levels." The author continues on, "The win this week for the Taifa Stars hopefully can act as a motivation to further improve the game and produce players to international standard so that they can play in

other countries. By doing this it would raise the standard of the national team and create awareness of Tanzania in the international sports arena and ultimately contribute to Tanzania's economy. We all remember the late Mwalimu Nyerere saying to the nation: "It can be done, play your part" (Saria 2007). The manner in which the author so effortlessly combines the themes of politics, economics, and development in his post-match assessment underscores the politically-charged history of the sport and its potential to configure the relationship between the citizen and the state.

The blending of sports and politics is not unusual in Africa, and Tanzania has its own unique history of using football as a vehicle for foreign and domestic policy. In the past, Tanzania has used sport as a tactic to isolate the South African and Rhodesian governments. On a domestic level, Tanzania has had more difficulty employing football to demonstrate the socialist government's political messages of national unity and the effacing of individuality. In fact, Tanzanian football has been noted for accentuating divisiveness on regional, sub-regional, and political differences rather than drawing people together (McHenry 1980). The nation's organizing football body has been the constant scapegoat for Tanzania's poor football fortunes and this continues in today's discourse. In a speech welcoming the exhibition of the World Cup trophy in Tanzania in January 2006, President Kikwete reiterated the enfolding of football with politics: "We should all strive with renewed vigor and commitment to break the barriers of the past that have hindered football development in Tanzania. This FIFA World Cup trophy could not have come at a better time. It has come when we in the new administration are committed to work...to turn the dark chapter in soccer fortunes in Tanzania." He

continues:

Fortunately, work on the construction of a state of the art football stadium is in progress. We are not putting up an ultramodern sports complex for the fun of it. We want it to be a motive for success. Players with talent are abounding in the country. They need to be developed. This is possible. Many countries in this Continent have done that, why not us. It can be done if we all played our part. If, for any reason we cannot do it alone let us look for assistance elsewhere. I have no doubt that some people or organization somewhere would readily help. I am sure FIFA's decision to bring the Trophy to Tanzania is an expression of readiness to assist us in the quest for excellence. We stand ready to come to you for help (Kikwete 2006).

In using phrases such as "turn the dark chapter" and by criticizing the inability of previous administrations to create a stable foundation for the development of football, Kikwete not only recalls Tanzania's lengthy history of football mismanagement, but he also neatly intertwines his own administration's platform on anti-corruption and transparency into the realm of sports. Like the previous quote which spoke to the need for both the citizen and the state to also share responsibility for the country's football development, Kikwete repeats the same Nyerere quote that "it can be done if we all play our part," reclaiming the historically popular theme of self-reliance that was a catchphrase of socialist-era Tanzania. However, at the same time, he offers a very candid plea for

outside help. By drawing from Tanzania's past political rhetoric, Kikwete is reiterating the terms of citizenship. However, he is also using the discourse of sports and development to simultaneously posit his own political agendas on anti-corruption and international development. The "ultramodern" Tanzanian National Stadium, built in partnership with the Chinese, becomes a centerpiece in a revised discourse on development and citizenship for present-day Tanzania.

Perhaps the marriage of sports and politics is best viewed in the context of the multiple roles played by the old National Stadium. The old Stadium was built in 1961 and was initially a special parade ground made to celebrate Tanzania's independence from Britain, and Independence Day celebrations occur there every year. The venue has not only held the nation's most important sporting events, but it is also the site for some of its most significant political moments. All four of Tanzania's presidents have given their inaugural address at the stadium. In 1999, the funeral ceremony of the father of the nation, Julius Nyerere, was held there.

However, as a site for football, the old National Stadium was running on its last legs. Citing poor conditions and "security concerns" for players and fans, Africa's governing football body had declared it unfit for international competition in 2001 (Muga 2003). Towards the end of his tumultuous reign as Tanzania's third president, Benjamin Mkapa promised to leave behind a modern stadium by 2005. In 2003, he announced: "We are now determined to support the game. We plan to hire a foreign technical director, who will develop youth football. We will first have to contact friends who could help in finding one. We have abundant talents that need to be tapped (Muga 2003)." Again, Mkapa pairs football with

almost the exact same vocabulary that his successor, Jakaya Kikwete, would use 3 years later in his speech welcoming the World Cup trophy: the renewed determination to the sport, the seeking of outside help, and the excavation of talent. However, while Mkapa seemed to make promises, Kikwete is gaining a reputation for actually following through. The search for a foreign technical director that Mkapa calls for is accomplished with Kikwete's recruitment, hiring, and funding of Brazilian coach Marcelo Maximo. And although Mkapa paved the way for the creation of the new National Stadium and had secured support from the Chinese, the actual completion of the stadium will occur under Kikwete's watch.

The new National Stadium is estimated to cost \$40-\$60 million with the Tanzanian government contributing slightly more than half of the total cost (National Stadium 2007). The new Stadium is hailed by the Chinese as another sign of the historically strong Sino-Tanzanian relationship, following in the tradition of joint projects like the Tanzania-Zambia Railway line. In his visit to Tanzania in June 2006, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao took time to visit the construction site of the new national stadium. At the stadium, he addressed both Tanzanians and the Chinese contractors who had won the bid for the stadium: the multi-billion dollar Beijing Construction Engineering Group (who themselves were following plans made by the Beijing Institute of Architectural Design). He reiterated to the Chinese workers that they continue in the tradition of the railway workers of the previous generation to build a structure of high quality as a monument of friendship and cooperation between China and Tanzania. In response, the engineers and technicians promised to complete the project on schedule with quality guaranteed (Cooperation 2007). Indeed,

the Tanzania branch manager of the Beijing Engineering Construction Group remarked: "We intend to construct the new stadium to high standard (Philamon 2007)."

The terms "quality," "high standard," and "ultra-modern" are repeated in discourse on the new National Stadium, setting the terms of development in a modernist vocabulary. Consider this description of the stadium: "The foundation of the stadium consists of isolated column footing while the main structure is made of reinforced concrete frame. In addition, the roof covering is a steel structure comprising suspended steel pipe trusses and PETF membrane. Nearly 70 percent of the seats are covered by membrane structure. This has brought about the perfect combination of the latest engineering technology and architectural aesthetics (Construction, Stadium 2007)."

After a visit to the construction site, Dar es Salaam mayor Adam Kimbisa talked about the need for Tanzanian engineers and contractors to adopt rigorous standards so that they can bid for high profile jobs like the stadium, and he suggested that the local firms can learn from the work of the Beijing Construction Engineering Group (Philamon 2007). The mayor makes a good point. Even though more than 95% of Tanzania's contractors are local, they receive only 10% of the country's multi-billion shilling industry. Less than 3 percent of all registered contractors are foreign based yet they receive over 70% of the country's large and medium-sized contracts (Construction, Contractors 2007).

In the same visit, the Dar es Salaam mayor also called on the need for stakeholders to "take care of the new national stadium since the government has spent a lot of money to construct it (Philamon 2007)." Perhaps this comment is in reference to the degraded state of the

old National Stadium, which was recently banned from international use due to "security concerns" for the players and the fans, as hooliganism and violent conduct by Tanzania's club and national players plagued the country's football scene for decades. In one analysis, although football was meant to provide a platform for national unity, in practice, players and fans used the sport as a way to voice displeasure against Tanzania's social and economic conditions during the socialist era. The pitch and the stands were characterized as "safety valves" for exercising political opposition (McHenry 1980).

By calling for the need for stakeholders to protect the new National Stadium as a resource, the mayor of Dar es Salaam refers to a troubled past while simultaneously offering the possibility of using the stadium to reconstruct Tanzania's relationship to football and to the state – to reconstruct Tanzanian citizenship. While it is clear that the pride of the nation is at stake in this ultramodern monument, that the old National Stadium was the site for opposition to safely voice dissent means that the new Stadium cannot be taken for granted as a place devoid of political opposition. The new National Stadium may be an attempt to turn the corner on Tanzania's dark chapter of failed sports efforts and shameful violence, but it also opens the door for Tanzanians to reconfigure their minds in matters of international aid and development. Perhaps a monument reflecting Tanzania's imagined status in both football and international development will disguise the fact that much of the foreign and domestic funds invested in the National Stadium will flow back within Chinese borders as the specialists of the Beijing Construction Engineering Group and the Beijing Institute of Architectural Design work as hired hands and Chinese building materials are purchased in

the pursuit of quality (Ashurst 2007). In this situation, the actual value of Tanzania's development relationship with China goes unquestioned as the promise of future quality is conferred through the present importation of foreign quality, and is tangibly captured in a monument which does nothing more than to offer a seemingly more real possibility of national glory.

In an attempt to position the Tanzania national team as players in global athletics, in much the same way that Jay-Z has given status to the local Tanzanian artists, President Kikwete has summoned the world's most popular and most expensive football team, Real Madrid, to play against Tanzania's finest in opening ceremonies for the stadium. Even though the terms of their arrival call for five-star accommodations and non-stop first-class flights, to President Kikwete, the millions needed to cajole the 9-time European champions to Tanzania is a necessary move to reverse the country's fortunes (Ayieko 2007, ThisDay 2007).

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