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Michael G. Schatzberg

Soccer, science, and sorcery: causation and African football¹

Abstract

This article treats two modes of political causation. First, the contemporary scientific mode that most social sciences simply take for granted and assume, quite unthinkingly, to be universally applicable and valid in all circumstances. Second, because the discussion uses African materials and empirical examples drawn from the realm of football, the article also explores a mode of causation based on the active manipulation of supernatural forces that in much of Africa is usually called witchcraft or sorcery. The essay begins with a general examination of how these two modes of understanding causation play themselves out in African football with examples drawn largely from the 2002 World Cup. It then presents a more focused analysis of one match between the national sides of Uganda and Rwanda that occurred in 2003 to demonstrate the interplay of science and sorcery in a more 'controlled' manner.

Keywords

Cameroon, Senegal, Uganda, Rwanda, witchcraft, World Cup, African Cup of Nations

The social sciences have a problem. Put simply, they almost always assume that canonical definitions of concepts such as power, legitimacy, gender, democracy, state, and civil society, as well as the theoretical templates

¹ I wish to acknowledge the generous support of the African Studies Program of the University of Wisconsin-Madison which allowed me to do fieldwork in Uganda during June-July 2001. This brief period of fieldwork enabled me to interview, formally and informally, a range of Ugandans involved in the soccer community. I am also grateful to the Makerere Institute for Social Research for its warm hospitality, and the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology for research clearance. Mr. Joshua Danforth provided able research assistance in 2003, aiding me in systematically reading and analysing the sports pages of both Kampala dailies, *New Vision* and *Monitor*. Preliminary versions of parts of this paper were presented at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) at the University of the Witwatersrand, and at UCLA. All my audiences provided gentle yet probing criticism, as did Susann Baller and the anonymous reviewers for this journal.

that accompany them, are universal and thus may be applied far from the cultural context where they were devised with at best only minor adjustments. This is not always the case, however, for as Susanne Hoerber Rudolph (2002: 194) usefully reminds us, '[a] concept such as association ... has acquired heavy cultural baggage on its Toquevillian journey through France, England, and America. Few concepts travel well because few are transparently commensurable.' In other words, students of politics and society must demonstrate this would-be conceptual universality rather than simply assuming it. Moreover, there also needs to be greater attention paid to cross-cultural comparisons of our implicit conceptions and understandings of what constitutes 'the political' and the realm of politics, for these are not always universal either. And, finally, we need to take greater account of the fact that individuals during the course of their daily interactions often display rather different understandings of political causality than those that political science, a discipline still enamoured of a perhaps mistaken view of science and scientific progress, customarily assumes to be valid (Kuhn 1996, Rabinow 1996). Put differently, political scientists also need to compare these various understandings of political causation (Schatzberg 2001).

This article will treat only a small portion of this large research agenda by comparing different understandings of political causality. I will argue that individuals often understand causation in different ways and that these vary according to the specific context of the moment. In addition, I also maintain that most of us can, and do, entertain vastly different, complex, and occasionally contradictory causal notions simultaneously. Stated directly, contextually sensitive alternative modes of political causality coexist, sometimes interact and are not mutually exclusive. A mode of causality, parenthetically, is simply an implicit conceptual template that privileges a specific causal factor such as the maximization of interests, divine intervention, sorcery, or the location and movement of the heavenly bodies.

What, then, can we say about modes and understandings of political causality which depend on sorcery, a supreme being, the intervention of the ancestors, or astrology? In some cultures it is clear these are alternative causalities that at least cohabit and coexist with the scientific mode in cognitive space. At different times, and in some cultural contexts, they may certainly rival the dominance of the scientific mode of causal understanding in the political lives that people actually lead. They may even achieve hegemony and form the basis of a durable 'common sense' understanding of the political world. In most cultures ordinary individuals employ alternative causalities as the need arises. Depending on the situation and specific context, one may come to the fore rather than another. In addition, and to make matters even more complex, these alternative modes of causality often blend into one another. Most of us do not even stop to think about this conceptual blending and switching and we are usually unaware that we are doing it (Faucon-

nier/Turner 2002). Clearly, such alternative modes of causal understanding do not 'fit' into the causal reckonings of most empirical social sciences. Yet people believe in them, act upon them, and both understand and explain their political world as being subject to their causal influences. The influence of these alternative causalities will simply be seen as commonsensical and intuitive.

Two modes of political causation will occupy our attention throughout this essay. First, the contemporary scientific mode that most social sciences simply take for granted and assume, quite unthinkingly, to be universally applicable and valid in all circumstances. Second, since my discussion will draw on African materials and empirical examples drawn from the realm of football, I shall explore a mode of causation based on the active manipulation of supernatural forces that in much of Africa is usually called witchcraft or sorcery (Ashforth 2005).

Sociologist of sport Richard Giulianotti (1999: 24) introduced the term 'soccerscape' to stand for 'the geo-cultural circulation of football's constituent parts: players and coaches, fans and officials, goods and services, or information and artefacts'. Significantly, however, Giulianotti's definition does not include this cognitive and ideational dimension that structures what we come to understand as common sense. Missing, therefore, is the subjacent domain where the deeper political and cultural understandings of football may be found and excavated. An explicit appreciation of this implicit and usually unstated cognitive dimension of life is especially important in the world of African football because, despite its importance, it is a subject whose nature makes it extremely difficult to investigate (but see Scotch 1961, Schatzberg 2000: 38-44, Alegi 2004: 49-51).

In this paper I shall use football as a microcosm through which we may more sharply discern those political, cultural, and economic processes and cognitive structures that are actually important as individuals conduct their daily lives. In other words, I assume that whatever occurs within the metaphorical touch lines of the soccerscape - the small, daily politics of football - will probably reflect the same, or quite similar, tectonic fault lines present in the high politics of the wider society. I also assume that the quotidian, in this case as represented by the daily practices, attitudes, and usually unstated understandings about football in any given African society will be linked in a variety of complex ways to the society's larger political arenas. Other scholars have used football to illuminate larger social and political forces, and the works of Lopes (2000) on Brazil, Bromberger's (1995) close analysis of matches in Southern Europe, and Porro and Russo's (2001) examination of the extrapolation of Berlusconi's industrial model to football and politics in Italy all merit attention. The near universality of football, as well as the uniformity of its rules and procedures, also enables us to hold constant certain structures of

the sport itself while seeking to uncover and explain any economic, political, and cultural variations that may occur.

I shall begin this essay with a general examination of how these two modes of understanding causation play themselves out in African football with examples drawn largely from the 2002 World Cup. Then, to demonstrate the interplay of science and sorcery in a more 'controlled' manner, I shall present a more focused analysis of one match between the national sides of Uganda and Rwanda that occurred in 2003.

Understanding African football: two approaches

The 2002 World Cup competition, as well as the world of African football more generally, provides rich examples of how various individuals might subscribe to several different modes of causality at more or less the same time. First, let us begin with the contemporary scientific mode. Briefly put, this understanding of causality is the one most familiar to social scientists. In general, this mode assumes implicitly that there are 'objective causes' behind political phenomena and events, and that we may discover and study them. Moreover, as Martin Hollis and Steve Smith (1990: 3) put it, 'the broad idea is that events are governed by laws of nature which apply whenever similar events occur in similar conditions. Science progresses by learning which similarities are the key to which sequences.' Such newly acquired knowledge can then be used to construct solutions for the problems that have troubled society in the past. The rational relation of means to ends, the belief in the possibility of progress, and a notion of the validity of scientific method and objective thought as a way to achieve progress are all present in one form or another. In other words, as in any other human activity, people may approach football scientifically by studying the game and by trying to isolate the practices and procedures that bring consistent success. Once these factors are known, officials and players can apply them to improve performance. So emphasizing a rational division of labour within teams, eliminating internal dissension, applying the most successful coaching and training methods, as well as dedicated effort are all cornerstones of a scientific approach. In this way players and team officials will achieve their broader goal of becoming champions.

In the period preceding the 2002 World Cup, various Cameroonian officials and business people tried to make sure that the 'Indomitable Lions' would have plenty of financial incentive to work and train hard so as to win the tournament. The managing director of Guinness Brewery in Cameroon happily noted before the Cup began that Guinness Cameroon was already paying £5,000 (UK) to each Lion simply for qualifying. Furthermore, the best player in each match would receive an additional £1,000 (UK) while the team

would get another £5,000 (UK) for progressing beyond the first round. The list of incentives was topped off by the company's contribution to the team of one cent for each bottle of Guinness sold in Cameroon during the World Cup.²

The Lions nonetheless found that the compensation structure and the bonuses promised either never materialized, were insufficient, or were 'eaten' by team or ministry officials. As a result the entire team got 'lost' in Paris while in transit to the Cup venue in Japan. The players believed that they had been denied their fair share of profits from two of their pre-World Cup friendlies against the Argentine side in Europe. The Youth and Sports Minister had to fly to France where he met with the players and was apparently able to resolve the problem of the missing money.³ The Lions lost two days in transit, however, and the disruption did not contribute positively to their performance on the pitch. Although the squad had won the recently-concluded African Cup of Nations in Mali and were certainly among Africa's strongest and most experienced sides, they never made it out of the first round.

This outcome was disappointing. Before the World Cup hopes were high for a much better result. At a reception hosted by Cameroon's prime minister, Peter Musonge, the Lions' German coach, Winfried Schäfer, stated that he felt it was time for an African team to make the tournament's 'final four'. He thought this would be possible because of the 'determination and passion' of the players. The prime minister promised the team the complete support of the government. Speaking to the team, he also added that, 'because you know your job and do it well, this nation can count on you.' On the same occasion, Iya Mohamed, president of the Cameroon Football Association (Fecafoot) agreed with Coach Schäfer that reaching the semi-finals was a reasonable goal. In doing so, he referred back to the government's support for the Lions before the 2002 African Cup of Nations campaign in Mali which, of course, the Lions won. Addressing his remarks to the prime minister, Mr. Mohamed noted that: 'Four months ago you [prime minister Musonge] received us here before the Nations Cup. It is a similar event today ... The advice, guests and decor are similar. Consequently the result should be similar.'⁴

If we refer back to the previously-cited passage from Hollis and Smith [the broad idea is that events are governed by laws of nature which apply whenever similar events occur in similar conditions' (Hollis/Smith 1990: 3)]

2 Etonge, M.: Cameroon announce Guinness deal. BBC, 9 May 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (10 May 2002).

3 Mbah, M. I.: Paper publishes 'strike details'. BBC, 28 May 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (29 May 2002).

4 Etonge, M.: Schäfer: Semis are our target. BBC, 11 May 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (14 May 2002).

we can see that although Mr. Mohamed's choice of variables (the reception, advice, guests, and decor) ultimately lacked explanatory power and his implicit hypothesis was disconfirmed, his reasoning was quite scientific.

Another example of this particular mode of causality comes from the one African team that did have significant success in the 2002 World Cup, the Lions of Senegal. The Senegalese Lions opened the tournament against the defending champion, France, and contrary to the expectations of most serious observers, emerged victorious. National elation and joy erupted immediately. President Wade declared a national holiday and a nation-wide celebration ensued. One article that appeared after this triumph noted that there was a science of football. It argued that if Western countries dominate the world and set the cadence that the rest of the world experiences, it is because they have invested much in science.

Today, it is time to demonstrate that Africa can come out of it [its misery and underdevelopment] by allying its sporting practice to a will to make scientific, economic, philosophical, [and] medical knowledge its own. This knowledge ... transforms the life of people. That requires strengthening investments in the only domains able to reinforce the quality of people who make up the continent: education and health. That also requires an iron discipline and the will to build Africa together.⁵

The second mode of causality pertains to witchcraft and sorcery, terms that I shall use interchangeably. Since this notion is notoriously difficult to define precisely, I shall simply start from the definition of a Kenyan legal scholar who regards sorcery as a 'supernatural power' and sorcerers as 'people who are possessed of, and practice such power' (Mutungi 1977: 9). In some ways the invisible side of power, many Africans understand sorcery as a mode of causality because they believe that the forces of the night, as well as those possessing the ability to harness them, often influence an individual's life chances, daily events, national politics, and - of course - results on the soccer pitch. Unfortunately, this influence is often harmful and malevolent. Sorcery, therefore, is also about the spiritual and supernatural aspects of pain and explanation - causing pain to others and explaining things to oneself. And, to be sure, in some cases people may also use sorcery to protect themselves and their loved ones from the spiritual aggression of others. A means of achieving certain results in the material world by actively precipitating the intervention of the spirit world, sorcery is a thoroughly modern phenomenon that some

5 Ndià, I. K.: La science du football, la science tout court. *Le Soleil* (Dakar, Senegal), 1 June 2002. Online: <http://www.lesoleil.sn> (12 June 2002). This and all subsequent translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

may also use to cope with insecurity and uncertainty (Ashforth 2000, Ashforth 2005, Geschiere 1997).

Once again, our illustrations will come from the world of football, notably the 2002 African Cup of Nations as well as the World Cup. Before the start of the African Cup of Nations in Mali in February 2002, the sport's regional governing body, the Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF), banned all 'team advisors' from any role within the teams competing for the Cup. Despite a lengthy history of illegality, sorcery and sorcerers have long been part of the African game. But this official, continent-wide ban has always been honoured more in the breach than in the observance, so the occasionally prominent roles of 'wise men', 'counsellors', 'technical consultants', and 'morale officers' in the sport have gone undisturbed. CAF took this step because it did not wish to present a 'Third-World image' during the most prestigious high-profile tournament on the continent.⁶ To be sure, this is an old struggle that is often covered in the sports pages of African newspapers and other media (Schatzberg 2001: 111-144). For example, when CAF publicized its ban prior to the Cup competition, the BBC interviewed its African Player of the Year, Bayern Munich's defender Samuel Kuffour. When asked for an opinion, Kuffour replied that 'It is an old belief that has no place in modern football. ... Juju can never help a player become a superstar. Only hard work, training and discipline will do that.'⁷

The issue is often phrased as a disagreement between those who favour contemporary scientific methods of training and those who accept that sorcery has a role to play. Prior to the World Cup, a BBC website discussion group responded to the question of whether sorcery has a strong role in football. The following opinions illustrate the ideas of those favouring a scientific understanding of causation and sporting success. W. Abiola (Nigeria) stated: 'Africans have always intrigued me with their nonsensical beliefs. Now we are debating issues of little relevance to sports. I understand that there is usually a lot at stake on those big games and people are willing to do whatever it takes to win. However, the superior, well-trained and well-prepared team will always win.' Rotimi Fashakin (Nigeria/Arizona USA) agreed: 'Witchcraft has nothing to do with football, with proper planning, hard work and training the sky is the limit and for the Super Eagles they should train well. The World Cup is not a small boy's game, we need proper training and discipline among the players.' Ife Sofola (Nigerian in Spain/USA) displayed impeccable scientific logic: 'Let us be real. If witchcraft really worked in football, the Africans

6 Witchdoctors banned from Nations Cup. BBC, 16 Jan. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (17 Jan. 2002).

7 Witchdoctors banned from Nations Cup. BBC, 16 Jan. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (17 Jan. 2002).

would have won the World Cup several times over. A lot of 'witchcraft' appears to play on the psyche of the opponents. Please don't count on witchcraft to defeat Argentina, England or Sweden.'⁸ One participant (ASEC, USA-Côte d'Ivoire) in this online discussion took a rather different tack:

Believe it or not, juju does exist in African football and it has a powerful role. Back home in elementary school we used to organise end of year tournaments. Back in the 80's we were playing our seniors of class six and our teacher promised us a feast if we beat our seniors, so some of my class mates and myself went to see a 'Marabout' (Moslem juju maker). The man mixed something with water and asked us to wet our faces, hands and feet with the water and drink some. He also gave some kind of chain to our goalkeeper and asked him to put it around his waist. His last words were: 'Do not touch any ball before the game starts.' We listened to him and we beat our seniors that day. ... Since then we always consulted the man until his death in the late 90's. It's not easy to believe that juju exists in African football if you are not from the continent.⁹

Many Africans, of course, have no difficulty in subscribing to such beliefs. For example, in early February 2002, Thomas Nkono, Cameroon's goalkeeping coach was arrested by Malian riot police for allegedly using 'black magic' prior to Cameroon's semi-final match with Mali in the African Cup of Nations. Nkono had apparently thrown an 'object' down on the pitch and the Malian authorities believed it was a magical charm aimed at helping Cameroon's side in the match. The errant coach was beaten, stripped, handcuffed, and dragged off the pitch in full view of 50,000 fans. (Perhaps his efforts were successful for Cameroon won the match 3-0.) CAF then intervened, banning him from competition for one year for his 'outrageous and provocative' behaviour. Wishing to deny what was obvious to all familiar with the African game, CAF found that Nkono had 'acted aggressively towards police officers and attempted to enter the field by force'. In addition, CAF initially suspended Cameroon's head coach for the final match, but then later reinstated him.¹⁰ Some months later, just before the World Cup, one of the candidates

8 Does witchcraft have a place in football? BBC Sport Online: Sports Talk, 8 Apr. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (16 Apr. 2002).

9 Does witchcraft have a place in football? BBC Sport Online: Sports Talk, 8 Apr. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (16 Apr. 2002).

10 The media coverage of this episode was extensive. See: Nkono in 'black magic' claim. BBC, 7 Feb. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (4 Apr. 2002); Schäfer suspended for final. BBC, 8 Feb. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (18 Feb. 2002); Nkono gets one-year ban. BBC, 9 Feb. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (18 Feb. 2002); Schäfer cleared to sit on bench. BBC, 9 Feb. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (18 February 2002); Nkono ban lifted. BBC, 16 Apr. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (16 Apr. 2002).

(ultimately unsuccessful) for the presidency of FIFA (the soccer world's international governing body) and himself a Cameroonian, Issa Hayatou, defended CAF's actions without even once mentioning that sorcery, or the fear of sorcery, was involved in the altercation. 'Mr. Nkono did not follow the regulations, and the police tried to block him from the pitch. He was not happy with that, and took against the decision. The police have their instructions to keep people off the pitch, and nobody can break them, not even the president of CAF.'¹¹

Despite the Nkono adventure at the African Cup of Nations tournament and the obvious discomfort and embarrassment that some African football officials felt because of it, the participation of sorcerers in African football remains widespread. In April 2002 the Ivorian government settled a long-standing dispute with disgruntled sorcerers who claimed that they were responsible for the only success the country had ever had in the African Cup of Nations. The Ivorian side won the Cup in 1992, defeating Ghana. But the local sorcerers claimed that they had never been paid for their services and, ten years later, were threatening to put a curse on the national side if the debt were not discharged. The country's minister of defence and civil protection asked for forgiveness for 'the promises which weren't kept after the 1992 Nations Cup'. He offered the angry sorcerers a bottle of liquor and \$2,000 so that 'the village, through the perceptiveness of its wise men, will continue to help the Republic and, in particular, the minister of sport.'¹² Similarly, just prior to the 2002 World Cup, South African Sports Minister Ngconde Balfour approved the decision to allow the South African side, the Bafana Bafana, to take 'traditional healers' with them to Seoul. 'If the Bafana Bafana players believe the efforts of the inyangas (traditional healers) help them to play better, they should be assisted by their special doctors. ... This is a cultural expression.'¹³

In Uganda various members of Uganda's larger football community echoed this understanding of sorcery as an alternative mode of causality. For example, as one unhappy fan put it when the coach of her favourite team went missing: 'The club has been doing well since Kheri's arrival. He has now left - when shall we ever stop these embarrassments? Who bewitched us?' a visibly disappointed young lady cried out at Nakivubo.'¹⁴ Another long-time member of the community as a player and supporter of the game put it this way:

11 Hayatou replies. BBC, 15 May 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (15 May 2002).

12 Witch doctors placated. BBC, 6 Apr. 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (8 April 2002).

13 SA team can employ healers. BBC, 8 May 2002. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (9 May 2002).

14 Zziwa, H. B.: KCC coach missing, fans mad. *Monitor* (Kampala), 24 Apr. 2000, p. 30.

The power of belief cannot be underrated. There are certain powers which cannot be denied. Their existence is a fact. There are some people involved in that thing. People do a lot of things in the dark. Someone I know lost a job as coach ... because as a born again [Christian] he could not take money to go and pay the sorcerer.¹⁵

A well placed football official largely agreed that sorcery was an important part of football in Uganda.

Last week when Express played against Villa on Saturday, on the Friday before the match they arrested one or two people trying to put certain 'things' on the bench of the opposing team. Some clubs do really believe in this. It is not in the budget of the club, but it is hidden in the budget for a particular match. ... When I played for the [team name], a man would come before the games and would rub the knees of all the players. He would rub mine too. At first I said what is this, but the other players said, no, let him do this. I didn't think this would work, but when we won, one of our leaders, I was near him, and the first comment he made was 'See, I always told you that these things work.' It's psychological.¹⁶

Finally, a club official put it this way:

It [sorcery] plays a role here, too. People may not publicize it as much as elsewhere though. I'm a Christian and I don't believe in this. But every club has players and officials who believe in sorcerers and the dark powers to help them win. Sorcery here is not on the budget of the clubs per se, but if I were a club official or a player who believed in it, I would make sure to find the money for it. The fans also become involved in this way, but not so much for the national team. They indulge in it but wish to keep it quiet. It is a closely guarded secret.¹⁷

But after a match between Uganda and Rwanda in 2003, the so-called secret, never really all that closely guarded, was visible to all.

Uganda versus Rwanda, 2003

In March 2003 the national side, the Uganda Cranes, began active preparation for their home and away matches with their Rwandan rivals. Ugandans were confident, perhaps too confident, of a victory that would help them to advance in the African Cup of Nations competition and reach the finals in Tun-

¹⁵ Interview, K-3, Kampala, 3 July 2001.

¹⁶ Interview, K-4, Kampala, 5 July 2001.

¹⁷ Interview, K-7, Kampala, 11 July 2001.

sia in 2004. While the Ugandans warmly remembered their 5-0 demolition of the Rwandan team at home in 1998, memories of the fact that the same side had fought them to a scoreless tie in the Kigali fixture of that encounter had dimmed. Ugandan players were optimistic, however. 'I am confident of a win but I'm sure it will be respectable, not as embarrassing as in 1998. Rwanda has become a regional soccer power and this makes them a more formidable unit', noted one. Another was less cautious: 'A triumph against Rwanda will put us in good stead. Having defeated a star studded Ghana, Rwanda shouldn't be much of a barrier. Besides, we encountered them twice in CECAFA.'¹⁸

In point of fact, caution was warranted. The first leg in Kigali resulted in another scoreless tie. The press noted, however, that many Ugandans who witnessed the match believed that the final score resulted not so much from the abilities and tactics of the two sides, but rather from certain other factors. In the words of a British journalist:

Rwanda's home tie against Uganda had simmered on the edge of extreme violence. As the Rwandan goalkeeper had pulled off one implausible save after another the Ugandan players grew wild-eyed with rage, absolutely convinced he was using juju, that he had either applied a magic potion to his gloves or dug protective witchcraft into the grass behind his goal.¹⁹

The Ugandan press made the same point, but phrased it more delicately:

Superstition is one theory that seems to preoccupy the minds of Ugandans, both fans and footballers. Why the dominant Cranes were bent on believing that the mysterious black cloth, keeper Mohamoud Mossi tied firmly in his net, persistently failed them [made them fail] raises eyebrows.²⁰

One effect of the tie with Rwanda was that it put enormous pressure on the Cranes to come up with a stellar performance at home because the loser would almost certainly be eliminated from the competition. If the Cranes won, however, they would secure a trip to their second ever African Cup of Nations final, and their first since 1978. The date was a significant one in Ugandan football history, a marker of subsequent futility which many could readily recall. When asked to explain this lack of success at the continental

18 Opiyo, J.: Caution against very high expectations. *New Vision* (Kampala), 28 March 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (30 June 2005); Countdown Rwanda v Uganda. *New Vision*, 10 March 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (30 June 2005); CECAFA = Confederation of East and Central African Football Associations.

19 Carlin, J.: Rwanda's magic moment. *Observer*, 13 July 2003. Online: <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/> (3 July 2005).

20 Namanya, M.: Stalemate. *New Vision*, 31 March 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (30 June 2005).

level, one state official noted that Uganda had last triumphed in 1978 because of Idi Amin. 'In 1978 we had Amin the mad ruler, but he was also mad about football and boxing so they got some resources. After that the wars followed. In the few areas of Uganda that have been peaceful since Amin, the infrastructure is just not there.'²¹ Another close observer of Uganda's soccer scene, himself a former Crane, also noted the link to Amin as well as the politics of the situation more generally:

Soccer is a place where people come together socially. It also lacks 'the political touch' here, except when Amin was in power. Why is this absent? Because of the absence of sports enthusiasts in the cabinet. The politicians do not pay much attention to football. Yet politics affects football. It is politics through and through.²²

The shock of an unexpected tie in Kigali, coupled with Uganda's twenty-five year history of football futility, created a volatile climate in which the sport's local governing body, FUFA (the Federation of Uganda Football Associations) intervened to sack the coach. The fired coach, veteran Paul Hasule, had led the Cranes to a 1-0 win over Ghana and the goalless draw on the road against Rwanda. FUFA's technical committee noted that he had failed to accomplish his task and had been guilty of poor judgment in player selection. In its wisdom, almost on the eve of a major international match, FUFA's leadership decided it would offer a short-term contract to an Argentine coach, Pedro Pasculli, for the remainder of the qualifying matches. Unfortunately, Pasculli knew little English and apparently even less about the local culture.²³

Recent political history and the second Congo war further complicated the dynamics of the match. Where Rwanda and Uganda had once been allies in the Congo, by 2003 they had fallen out and had actually wound up in armed conflict in Kisangani. The match in Kampala on 7 June 2003 thus took place in a tense atmosphere. When the Rwandan squad tried to make their way from the hotel to the stadium, normally a fifteen minute drive, they were confronted by an almost impenetrable traffic jam. After an hour the bus had barely moved and the players and coaches became frantic, fearing they would have to forfeit the match. The president of the Rwandan Football Federation, Brigadier Cesar Kayizari, finally left the bus and walked several kilometres through the heat and congestion to the bottleneck where he found traffic

21 Interview, K-8, Kampala, 11 July 2001.

22 Interview, K-3, Kampala, 3 July 2001. Actually, some Ugandan politicians do pay close attention to football and participate in a variety of ways.

23 Katende, N.: Sacked. *New Vision*, 14 May 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (30 June 2005); Katende, N.: Translator for Pasculli. *New Vision*, 16 May 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (30 June 2005).

police idly doing nothing. He apparently then pretended to be a senior Ugandan officer and dressed down the offending policemen in fluent English. Their energy thus renewed, the police then began to get the traffic moving in short order. The Rwandan bus nevertheless appeared two hours late. Kayizari insisted that his players be given ample time to warm up.

A British account described the match in these terms:

As the players stepped on to the pitch the Ugandans cast leery glances at the Rwandan goalkeeper, Mohammud Mossi. Mossi, a flamboyant and fully paid-up member of the gratuitously acrobatic school of goalkeeping, did nothing to allay their misgivings. Holding up his gloved hands to them, he said: 'I've got electric juju today. It's so strong you can't see it.' Within 15 minutes of the start, the game had descended into a bloodbath. Mossi was to blame. A couple of great early saves had provided both the crowd (60,000 crammed into a stadium with an official capacity of 45,000) and the Ugandan players with conclusive evidence that the Rwandan keeper was invoking the aid of supernatural agents. One Ugandan player charged at Mossi and tried to tear off his gloves. Another started digging behind the Rwandan goal line with his hands, frenetically searching for the offending juju. That was it. Mayhem. The mother and father of all punch-ups. Blood-spattered shirts all round. One Ugandan player got off the bench and hit a Rwandan, Jimmy Gatete, over the head with his boot. Blood poured down Gatete's shirt from a gash on his brow. Then the police entered the fray. Not to stop the players from fighting, but to pile into the plucky Rwandans, who forgot where they were, ignored the baying crowd, and were giving as good as they got.

The referee ordered the players off the pitch. It was the Ugandans who were in trouble now. It was they who might have to forfeit the game. Kayizari led the negotiations on the Rwandan side, threatening to head home, making the Ugandans sweat. But half an hour later the game resumed. Within minutes, Gatete, his head heavily bandaged, scored. Suddenly you could hear a pin drop in the stadium. The Rwandan radio commentator informed his compatriots that it seemed as if he was the only person making any noise.²⁴

Accounts in the Rwandan press noted the 'hostile environment. The Ugandan fans beat our players in the presence of security officers who acted with indifference.' Another story noted that 'two Ugandan fans left the terraces and jumped into [*sic*] the pitch entering Rwanda's goal to search for what they said was black magic. There the scuffle began...'²⁵ From the Ugandan perspec-

24 Carlin, J.: Rwanda's magic moment. *Observer*, 13 July 2003. Online: <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/> (3 July 2005).

25 Nsekanabo, E. C.: 90 minutes to Tunis. *The New Times* (Kigali), 12-15 June 2003, p. 30; Nsekanabo, E.: Nightmare in Namboole. *The New Times*, 12-15 June 2003, p. 12.

tive, however, things looked somewhat different. One correspondent wrote that Rwandan

keeper Mohammed Mossi started his psychological warfare by checking on juju inside his net. But it wasn't until a security guard clandestinely picked the juju, which comprised of black powder in a cloth, that catastrophe set in. Mossi, a skilled and flamboyant character, left goal to kick advertising billboards in search for his 'heart and soul.' He clashed with the shameless and bold FUFA official Crispus Muyinda, who put his credibility at risk by joining the madness. Just about everyone on the turf got involved. Tabula captained the witchcraft warfare ... [others] were also in the thick of the violence. ... When both sides agreed to resume after half an hour, Rwanda were clearly the benefactors. Cranes, probably having consumed most of their energy fighting witchcraft, paid dear ...²⁶

When this match took place, Uganda's new coach Pedro Pasculli had logged less than one month with his new team, and he was stunned by the turn of events: 'The witchcraft scenario and fighting led to our loss.' He also noted that 'I am still shocked by this witchcraft that I witnessed for the first time in my football career. I have played in South America and witnessed many things in football, but this was too much for me. This witchcraft issue disorganised my whole team because they were so taken up and failed to concentrate.'²⁷

The episode more than confirms that many Ugandans believe in witchcraft as a mode of causal explanation. As one journalist put it: 'So when Abubaker Tabula tried to neutralise the 'juju' in the Rwanda goal at Saturday's Nations Cup tie, the close to 50,000 fans easily related to the act, and the midfielder was an instant hero.' This commentator then went on to argue, tongue only partially in his cheek, that instead of hiring the Argentine coach FUFA should have paid for an official team witchdoctor. 'With the witchdoctor on the bench,' he continued, 'the players, coach and manager would then concentrate on playing football and grasping team tactics. The official Ugandan witchdoctor would have battled the diminutive and provocative goalkeeper Mossi and his magic last weekend. Uganda would have qualified for the African Cup of Nations, won it, then marched on to win the World Cup in 2006.'²⁸

But while many reporters recognize that sorcery is part of life, and thus football, that does not mean that they have to like this particular mode of

26 Namanya, M.: Ugly & nasty. *New Vision*, 9 June 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (19 April 2004).

27 Rwandans party after win. BBC, 9 June 2003. Online: <http://news.bbc.co.uk> (4 July 2005).

28 Jadwong, L.: It's about time FUFA got Cranes an official witchdoctor! *New Vision*, 10 June 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (19 Apr. 2004).

causality. In fact, while the sports pages are honest about recognizing sorcery and the role of sorcery in football, most accounts and discussions of it are hostile. In the wake of the second leg against Rwanda, for example, one commentator put it this way:

To the straight-thinking fans, the Rwanda-Uganda debacle at Namboole last Saturday is an embarrassing, stupid, head shaking circus straight from a comic book. To the superstitious, the two shots that hit the woodwork, the missed chances and the 'goal' Hakim Magumba scored but no one saw, is down to the influence of magic charms! That a national team would hinge it[s] chances of qualifications for the Nations Cup to black magic, is a classic example of how witchcraft is embedded in the minds of locals that anything beyond normal understanding is attributed to witchcraft.²⁹

It can almost go without saying that 'straight-thinking' fans believe in science while the 'locals', who are, of course, the journalist's fellow citizens, believe in sorcery. He concludes the article on a more scientific note by approvingly quoting one Crane this way:

'In a nutshell, all that our game needs is organisation, hard work and cash. Players should change their minds. Otherwise lightweight teams like Rwanda will chalk up shock wins while we cry witchcraft that does not exist at all,' said one Cranes player. Indeed, the Peles, David Beckhams and Philip Omondis of this world were made through extreme hard work not juju. Cranes had better take note.³⁰

A similar theme was sounded by a FUFA official. Denying that FUFA would even consider hiring a sorcerer, he noted that 'we are trying to find a way in which we will educate fans and all those concerned that juju does not work in football.'³¹

Various letters to the editor reflected the same themes. One of them from a long-term member of the larger football community put it in these terms:

Let's wake up. The hopelessness of this situation has been there for all to see for the last 10 or so years. There will never be a short-cut to success. Football is not pure luck. There are no quick fixes! The only way out of this quagmire is to re-focus. Set a long-term goal (8-12 years). But first attract more intelligence into our football administration, galvanise all football efforts and pru-

29 Batte, J.: Witchcraft part and parcel of Ugandan football. *New Vision*, 14 June 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (19 Apr. 2004).

30 Batte, J.: Witchcraft part and parcel of Ugandan football. *New Vision*, 14 June 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (19 Apr. 2004).

31 Katende, N.: No Cranes witchdoctor - Mawanda. *New Vision*, 12 June 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (30 June 2005).

dently deploy our resources around that goal. So what do Ugandans plan to do about it? Cry for the Cranes? No!³²

Put differently, whatever ails the Cranes can be remedied by a combination of organizational efficacy, individual effort and hard work, material resources, and education against belief in sorcery. For these popular analysts the answer to Uganda's woes on the pitch lies in the systematic and knowledgeable application of resources to desired outcomes. In other words, science is the solution. In general, this mode of causation assumes implicitly that there are 'objective causes' behind various social, political, and economic phenomena and events, and that we may discover and study them. Such newly acquired knowledge, moreover, can then be used to construct solutions for the problems that have troubled society in the past. The assumption of a desired rational relationship of means to ends, the belief in the possibility of progress, and a notion of the validity of scientific method and objective thought as a way to achieve progress are all present in one form or another in this debate about the role of sorcery in football. Here we witness two modes of causal understanding at work, as well as the many nuances, conceptual blending, and contradictions that exist when individuals may, in different contexts, feel fully comfortable subscribing to both modes at the same time.

Conclusion

Since this essay is but a first step in a much larger research project, it should be seen as an initial and tentative attempt to use an examination of the soccer-scape as a means of accessing and understanding certain phenomena and trends that are of wider political, cultural, and economic interest. Football lends itself to this approach because it is a sport that is played at different levels and in different metaphoric arenas. It thus permits us to use the small scale interactions of daily life on the soccer pitch and within the soccer community to understand and illuminate wider social and political phenomena. For example, this article has shown that an examination of an ostensibly 'non-political' arena such as football can throw into stark relief the different assumptions and understandings of causality in daily existence that have an impact on political life. The discourse on football present in the sports pages and among the soccer communities in Uganda and many others African countries reflects certain broad societal tensions between science and sorcery – two different and widely diffused modes of causal understanding through-

32 Magunda, B.: The Cranes must rise above belief in juju if they are to make a name!. *New Vision*, 13 June 2003. Online: <http://www.newvision.co.ug/> (19 April 2004).

out much of Africa. To the best of my knowledge, a range of various alternative modes of causality exist in all societies, although in the West individuals may occasionally be less aware of them because of the pervasive hegemony of science as an overarching conceptual orientation and belief system.

Let me make it clear, however, that my intent has not been to posit an opposition between Western science and African sorcery as competing, mutually exclusive modes of causal understanding. The preceding analysis shows clearly that many Africans firmly adhere to science as a means of improving the quality of their football while others do, at times, resort to sorcery as a primary explanation for victory and defeat. In addition, there are many times when a single individual will adhere to belief in both science and sorcery, depending on the context of the moment. Africans are far from unique in employing a range of different understandings of causation, as the astrological inclinations of the Reagan administration in the U.S. demonstrate (Schatzberg 2001: 116-117).

In the world of African football there is a widespread belief that sorcery can cause certain outcomes. In 2002, for example, many Senegalese attributed the injured quadriceps that sidelined France's star midfielder, Zinedine Zidane, from the opening World Cup match with Senegal to the power of Senegal's marabouts.³³ Without denying the important role of scientific knowledge or advanced training and hard work in preparation, football in Africa is an easily visible arena where one may discern some of the ways that sorcery as an alternative mode of causality actually operates. Many ordinary spectators and fans are also likely to apply their own first hand knowledge of sorcery's effects and power to their understanding and explanation of these sporting events. Sorcery, not science, is an explanation that many find intuitively commonsensical and thus persuasive.

Yet, running through the entire discourse on football, and especially the frequent lamentations concerning poor performance on the pitch that invoke both the authority of science and the need for a more focused scientific approach to training and development of a given national side or club team, is something deeper. Beneath the surface of this debate is, I suspect, a diffused sense of outrage that something in the larger, perhaps somewhat idealized, moral structure of both the sport and the society needs attention and repair. Usually unarticulated notions of economic fairness, political legitimacy, and social order are all in play. The remainder of this research project will be to discern how these larger ideas are played out within the microcosm of African football.

33 La blessure de Zidane provoquée par les marabouts? *Le Soir* (Brussels), 29 May 2002. Online: <http://www.lesoir.com> (29 May 2002).

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Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag behandelt zwei Arten politischer Kausalität: Zum einen die zeitgenössische wissenschaftliche Erklärungsweise, die in den Sozialwissenschaften zumeist unhinterfragt angewandt und als universell und in allen Kontexten gültig angenommen wird, zum anderen – weil er auf afrikanisches Datenmaterial Bezug

nimmt und die empirischen Beispiele aus dem Bereich des Fußballs stammen – eine Erklärungsform, die auf aktiver Manipulation von übernatürlichen Kräften beruht und in Afrika meist mit 'Hexerei' oder 'Magie' bezeichnet wird. Der Aufsatz untersucht zunächst – anhand von Beispielen vor allem der Weltmeisterschaft 2002 –, wie diese beiden unterschiedlichen Erklärungsmuster im afrikanischen Fußball generell deutlich werden. Anschließend analysiert er detailliert ein Spiel zwischen den Nationalmannschaften von Uganda und Rwanda im Jahr 2003, um das Wechselspiel von Wissenschaft und 'Hexerei' aus einem 'kontrollierteren' Blickwinkel heraus zu zeigen.

Schlüsselwörter

Kamerun, Senegal, Uganda, Rwanda, Hexerei, Weltmeisterschaften, Afrika Cup

Résumé

Cet article explore deux modes de la causalité politique. Tout d'abord, il y a le mode scientifique contemporain que la majorité des sciences sociales prennent comme certain et, peut-être sans y réfléchir, comme universellement valable dans tout contexte. D'ailleurs, la recherche étant basée sur des documents et des exemples empiriques du monde du football en Afrique, l'article s'intéresse ensuite au mode de la causalité liée à la manipulation active des forces surnaturelles qui sont généralement qualifiées de sorcellerie en Afrique. L'article commence par une investigation générale de ces deux modes afin de comprendre comment la causalité se manifeste dans le football africain, notamment à travers des exemples de la Coupe du Monde de 2002. Puis, il présente une analyse plus détaillée d'un match qui s'est déroulé en 2003 entre les équipes nationales d'Ouganda et de Rwanda. Cet exemple permet de montrer les interactions entre la science et la sorcellerie sous une optique plus 'contrôlée'.

Mots clés

Cameroun, Sénégal, Ouganda, Rwanda, Sorcellerie, Coupe de Monde, Coupe d'Afrique des Nations

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