



# Football, Colonialism, and Nationalist Resistance in Anglophone Africa

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## Abstract

Football matches are deeply emotional, recreational, cultural and political events for footballers and supporters in Anglophone Africa. Substantial literature demonstrates intricate connections of football fandom, nationalism and political resistance in Africa. This paper is based on a qualitative meta-analysis of extant literature on football fandom, nationalism and political resistance in Anglophone Africa. We argue that literature on football fandom, nationalism and political resistance in Africa is divided into two phases of intellectual production-pre-independence and post-independence. This body of literature largely demonstrates that football fandom is a crucial space where subaltern groups express various forms of nationalism. Moreover, studies also show that football fandom creates a sophisticated system of cultural and political codes which critique and subvert authoritarian political establishments. The paper brings into conversation literature on football, nationalism and resistance literature from seemingly divorced epochs and geographical regions, in order to demonstrate how football was central in fighting for rights of the under-privileged during and after British colonial rule in Africa. We also explore the nuanced arguments that connect this literature, illuminating on how stadium environment allows the down-trodden to freely associate, assemble and associate in authoritarian African contexts. We also examine the extent to which these arguments have metamorphosed over time. Finally, we suggest a possible trajectory future research can focus on especially in this digital age.

**Keywords** Anglophone Africa · Football fandom · Resistance · Politics · Nationalism · Resistance

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## 1 Introduction

This article reviews studies of football fandom, nationalism and political resistance in selected Anglophone African countries. Football in Africa is not limited to scoring goals on the pitch but also in politics, power struggles, cultural formations and economic matters (Lin et al., 2008; Pannenburg, 2010). Football fandom is one of the key spaces where ordinary people express and experience nationalism (Ncube, 2018; Zenenga, 2012). ‘Terraces’ are salient sites for the unfolding play of power, race, ethnicity, gender and political identities (Ncube, 2014a, 2014b). This is because there is limited restriction on people to express their views (Foer, 2004; Nauright, 1997). Citizens fearing reprisal from state security agents, resort to football stadium terraces to express their frustrations, resentment and aspirations.

We submit that studies on football fandom, nationalism and political resistance in Africa are divided into two phases of intellectual production—pre-independence and post-independence period. The uniqueness of our study lies in its attempt to bring into conversation literature around football fandom, nationalism and resistance from two seemingly divorced epochs and Anglophone African regions—East, North, West, and South. Critically, the analysis of fandom literature on nationalism and resistance from the different epochs and regions hopes to show the extent to which these arguments have metamorphosed over time. We therefore systematically explore the nuanced arguments that connect this literature. We also explore methodological orientation in existent literature. In addition, our study suggests a trajectory future studies could take in the area of football fandom, nationalism and political resistance. This is because football continues to occupy a complex and controversial place in the cultural, religious, political, economic and entertainment lives of millions of the continent’s powerful and powerless, and rich and poor (Pannenburg, 2010). The next section provides a context of British colonialism and administration in Africa. Such a discussion is critical in elaborating how the British colonial system of indirect rule unwittingly afforded subalterns to appropriate football discourse and speak truth to power.

## 2 Colonialism and nationalist political resistance in Anglophone Africa

Like many other colonial imports, football in Africa was a European invention (Stapleton, 2001; Alegi 2001). In fact, the history of football in Africa is encoded with the continent’s complex colonial experience (Alegi, 2010). The colonialization of Africa was conducted during the Age of the new imperialism, whereby from the 1870s onwards several European powers including Britain aspired and competed to seize territory in Africa (Linden 2016). The contribution of the British empire to the introduction and spread of football in colonial Africa is unrivalled. The British empire was famously referred to as the empire which the sun never sets, due to its geographical vastness.

At its height in 1920, the British empire covered 24 percent of the earth's population and political endurance spanning from the late sixteenth century to the late twentieth century (Ferguson, 2004; Hebert 2019). Notable African territories colonised by Britain included British East Africa (comprising the day African countries of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania), British Somaliland, Egypt, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. British West Africa (comprising the modern-day countries of Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and part of Cameroon). In Southern Africa British territories included Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Northern Rhodesia (Zambia), Nyasaland (Malawi), Bechuanaland (Botswana), Basutoland (Lesotho) and Swaziland. Sub-Saharan Africa was one of the last regions of the world to be colonised by the British. At this stage, the British were not prepared to invest large sums of money in establishing administrative apparatus the colonies, thus they had to leave most tasks of governing in the hands of Africans (Bolt and Gardner, 2020).

The central component of British colonial rule was native administration, whereby the natives were to be administered by their chiefs in accordance with their native customs and native land (Ali, 2018). This British system of colonial administration in Africa was more indirect in comparison to other colonial powers like the French as the British colonizers employed less administrative effort and devolved more power to native authorities (Müller-Crepon, 2020). The African local governments or native authorities were the vital link between the majority of the African population and the skeletal European administration (Bolt and Gardner, 2020). The prominent role of native authorities in British colonial Africa resulted in amplified ethnic segregation, which sowed the seeds of inter-ethnic conflicts in post-independence African states (Ali, 2018). Colonialism did not invent but exacerbated ethnic conflicts on the African continent (Mamdani, 1996).

The implications of native administration in British colonies were that political rights were tied to an individual's ethnic identity and not citizenship (Ali, 2018). The anti-colonial African nationalist movements that emerged following the second world war, were mostly organised along around regional-ethnic ties. The process of decolonisation in most Anglophone African territories was mostly rushed, with the nationalist movements not well prepared to govern (Bolt and Gardner, 2020). The initial post-colonial period from the early 1960s saw the emergence of the post independent state often dominated by an authoritarian centralised ruling party which attempted to legitimise its existence through creation of nationalistic narratives and projects (Nyambi, 2018). A number of post-independent anglophone African have witnessed ethno-regional political conflicts and struggles from Nigeria to Zimbabwe, Kenya and Ghana. Through a review of extant literature on football fandom, ethno-nationalism and resistance, this article demonstrates that despite animating millions of people in Africa football is a political and ideological structure where power and nationalism battles are contested in Anglophone Africa. Critically, sport does not happen in a vacuum but "gains its significance and meaning from the outside world" (Vidacs, 2004:151). The sporting lives of football supporters are not separate from the everyday (Fletcher, 2010). In the section below, we discuss the methodology of the paper.

### 3 Methodology

This is a literature review-based paper. The paper is based on qualitative interpretive meta-analysis of football fandom, nationalism and political resistance literature in selected Anglophone Africa. This literature is segmented into two phases of intellectual production—pre-independence and post-independence. We paid attention to nuanced arguments that connect this literature. We were interested in methodological orientation of the studies in football fandom, nationalism and political resistance both in colonial and post-independence times as well as geographical regions. This study is only limited to analysing literature in purposively sampled Anglophone Africa. Purposive sampling refers to selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to the research questions and the theoretical position and most importantly the explanation or account that is being developed (Yin, 2011). The magnitude or volume of literature on the subject in these countries persuaded our selection.

We are aware that the study could have been richer had we included other geographical parts of Africa. However, constant attention was paid to feasibility issues, specifically ensuring that the study is broad enough to capture all the salient issues without however becoming too wide to be manageable. Moreover, due to language barriers and different styles of colonial administration, we excluded Francophone and Lusophone Africa, albeit inferences are made to literature from such regions where necessary. Future research can focus on Francophone Africa and illuminate on the intersections of football, politics and resistance in the region. Our literature search mainly focused on accredited peer reviewed journal articles and book chapters. We confined our literature selection to journals accredited by Scopus, International Bibliography of the Social Science (IBSS) and Thomson Reuters Web of Science core collection. Doctoral and Masters dissertations also constitute important literature around football fandom in Africa. However, they were excluded in the current study due to the fact that though they are scrutinised by supervisors and examiners, they do not go through peer review process in the strictest sense. The next section examines studies on football and anti-colonial resistance in Anglophone Africa, linking them to the agency afforded to local by the British colonial system of indirect rule.

#### 3.1 Football and anti-colonial nationalist struggles in Anglophone Africa

The advent of colonialism in the last half of the nineteenth century transformed African societies and radically eroded its traditional sports and cultural forms and replaced them with western sports traditions (Darby, 2002). Colonialism thus laid the foundation for the diffusion of football in Africa (Alegi, 2010). From England, football diffused to different parts of the world through English men who went to work and to study abroad and most importantly, through imperial conquest and colonialism (Darby, 2000). Emissaries of the empire especially mission schools, military stations and in settlements along the ever-advancing railroad lines also popularized

the game throughout Africa (Alegi, 2010). The empire meant to use football or sport in general to 'civilize' and control the African population (Ncube, 2014a, 2014b; Stuart, 1995). Football was first introduced to Africans in the great industrial and commercial centers like Lagos, Cairo, Johannesburg, and Bulawayo amongst urban young as something that would kind of consume their energies and time which would be normally devoted to congregating and expressing their dissatisfaction with the new colonial political order (Darby, 2002; Giulianotti, 2004).

The administration of African sport in Anglophone Africa followed the political indirect decentralized form of administration with the locals retaining some autonomy in the organization of sport just as local traditional leaders administered the tribal trust land on behalf of the colonial authorities (Darby, 2002). The British administrators allowed the locals to run their own football associations. For instance, in Southern Rhodesia- present day Zimbabwe and Kenya sports like football were initially run by African welfare societies on behalf of the colonial administrators (Stuart, 1995; Njororai, 2009). In the Gold Coast-Ghana, Darby (2013) notes how football was run by regionalized African associations like the Gold Coast football Union based in Accra and the Gold Coast and Ashanti Football Union based in Kumasi. This allowed Africans to form their own football clubs, with the British colonizers exercising very limited control over how African teams were organized in neighborhoods or the meanings attached to those teams (Fair, 1997). The football clubs were mostly formed on the basis of common social identities like ethnicity, religion and social class, these clubs strengthened the unity of people within their neighborhoods and served to enhance the foundation from which African nationalist challenges were mounted (Alegi, 2010).

In Anglophone north Africa, football became entangled with Arab nationalism and anti-colonialism, particularly in Egypt where the role of Al Ahly football club is commonly cited. Football in general and Al Ahly in particular played a critical role for talking about the nation and nation-hood (Close, 2021). The name of Egypt's Al Ahly, means 'National' in Arabic, with its red insignia came to symbolise patriotic resistance to British rule in the 1920s when the Europeans were excluded from the club (Alegi, 2010). Raspaud and Lachheb (2014) note that Al Ahly was formed by Arab nationalist students in 1907 who used the club as a cover for anti-colonial struggles. Membership to club was also ethnic, restricting membership to people of Arab-Egyptian descent, hence the club epitomized the anti-colonial political aspirations of Arab nationalists (Raspaud & Lachheb, 2014). In the case of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan the earliest football teams such as Abu Rouf football club were formed along ethnic and religious lines and tacitly embraced symbols of anti-British resistance for instance borrowing names from Islamic and Mahdist history Tounsel (2018). Similar patterns on the role of African football clubs in anti-colonial resistance can also be observed in literature in anglophone east Africa, in the case of Kenya Njororai (2009) argues that.

"The British introduced football as a medium of strategic cultural imperialism, which elicited enthusiastic acceptance by a wide majority of youth in schools and urban areas and at the same time fostered newfound ethnic identity via team formations by ordinary citizenry. The colonial policy and practice of

divide and rule, and the political suppression of the day, seemed to have positioned football as an alternative avenue for ethnic identity, nationalism, and resistance.”

This was also the case in Tanganyika where Ndee (2005) notes that the two prominent clubs Young Africans and Simba Stars were used by nationalistic parties as arenas to promote and organize political resistance against British colonial rule. Stadiums and club houses became arenas in which workers, intellectuals, business owners, and the unemployed challenged colonial power and expressed a shared commitment to racial equality and self-determination (Alegi, 2010).

The role of African football teams in resisting colonialism is also documented in Southern Rhodesia. Substantial literature show that African football teams including Highlanders FC, Dynamos FC Zimbabwe Saints, Black Aces, among others were conduits for African nationalism and resistance in Southern Rhodesia (Ncube, 2014a, 2014b; Stuart, 1995; Zenenga, 2012). In fact, Dynamos FC, Zimbabwe Saints and Highlanders FC afforded political leaders from Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) to mobilise the masses and market anti-colonial ideologies. Prominent nationalists like Joshua Nkomo the founding president of the Zimbabwe People's Union (ZAPU) identified themselves with Highlanders FC club taking advantage of its social significance to the Ndebele ethnic group. Highlanders' FC fans also identified themselves with the broader nationalistic narratives in less subtle ways, for instance the christening of the grandstand where Highlanders fans sit in the Barbourfields stadium as the “Soweto stand” has echoes to the Southwestern Townships in Johannesburg, South Africa which at that time were a hotbed of the anti-apartheid, anti-colonial struggles (Ncube, 2014a, 2014b). The formation of Dynamos coincided with the formation of ZANU (The Zimbabwe African National Union) in 1963 which was a breakaway from the ZAPU albeit on ethnic grounds. Unsubstantiated assertions suggest that the nationalists who broke from Joshua Nkomo led Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) to form ZANU had a hand in the formation of Dynamos FC (Ncube, 2023). Stuart (1995) contends that Dynamos FC was established as a direct challenge to the colonial administration and the imposition of proto-apartheid policies. In fact, the formation of Dynamos FC was a direct response to the formation of a whites-only team in Salisbury and the disbanding of two local black teams – Salisbury City and Salisbury United (Ncube, 2023). Substantial literature shows that Dynamos FC matches became afforded urban Africans an opportunity to challenge white minority authoritarianism (Choto et al., 2017; Ncube, 2014a, 2014b; Stuart, 1995). Ncube (2014a, 2014b) argues that ‘Vietnam’ and ‘Soweto’ stands at Rufaro stadium (Dynamos FC home ground) and Babourfields stadium (Highlanders FC home ground) were key theatres for expressing anti-colonial discourses. The naming of Vietnam stand was inspired by the 1960s war in which the USA suffered its first defeat (Mangezvo, 2005). African nationalists strongly identified with the cause of the Vietcong, attaching it with their anti-colonial struggles. As for Babourfields' Soweto, it was christened after the popular black township of Soweto which was the hub of the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa (Mangezvo, 2005).

In Anglophone West Africa a similar pattern on the role of African football teams in the resistance against colonialism is also documented. In the context of Gold Coast-Ghana, Darby (2002) demonstrates how the earliest African football teams, Ashanti United and Accra Hearts of Oak were formed based on ethnic and regional rivalries and become the instrumental as mobilizing spaces for the nationalistic anti-colonial struggles. In Nigeria nationalists like Nnamdi Azikiwe took advantage of football matches to win support for the anti-colonial nationalist cause (Alegi, 2010).

The above cited cases demonstrate how the British system of indirect rule which gave Africans some degree of autonomy in the formation of football clubs which acted as platforms of ethnic -religious mobilization and identity. These platforms were quickly exploited by various nationalist movements and personalities to further their anti-colonial struggles. It is worth noting that disgruntled Africans chanted protest songs, symbols and gestures mocking colonial authority in football stadiums (Muponde & Muchemwa, 2011). Such fandom rituals raised political consciousness, while at the same time mocking colonial authority (Muponde & Muchemwa, 2011). In addition, African footballers were given nicknames loaded with messages that touched on the current affairs of the colony as well as the aspirations of the oppressed communities. This subversive language went undetected by the colonial authorities (Muponde & Muchemwa, 2011). Football, a discourse deployed by the colonial powers to protect their hegemony and win consensual rule of the majority Africans, ended up as an alternative public sphere that allowed counter hegemonic forces against colonial rule (Alegi, 2010; Ncube, 2014a, 2014b; Stuart, 1995). In the following section we demonstrate how football was appropriated and deployed by the downtrodden to challenge power after independence in Anglophone Africa.

### 3.2 Football and the Post-Independent Anglophone African political struggles.

The relationship between football and power in colonial Africa reproduced itself after attainment of independence (Alegi, 2010; Pannenberg, 2010). Politicians and governments in Africa deployed football as an instrument to control people (Pannenberg 2010). In fact, newly established African governments were aware of the threats posed by football hence they were keen to use its social appeal and power to promote their ideas of nationalism (Darby, 2013; Zenenga, 2012). However, due to political and economic conditions which remained oppressive and unfavourable despite the attainment of independence, sports clubs and soccer teams originally envisaged as a mechanism of social control soon became the focus for political confrontation in post-independence African countries (Alegi, 2010; Muponde & Muchemwa, 2011; Ncube, 2014a, 2014b; Pannenberg, 2010). These themes will be explored using a case-by-case basis.

In the case of Egypt following the attainment of nominal independence in 1922 the ruling King Farouk publicly aligned himself with Zamalek Sporting club a club that represented the monarchy, privilege, and foreigners, in contrast the anti-monarchy, pan- Arabic nationalist leaders like Saad Zaghouel and Jamel Abdel Nasser publicly aligned with Al Ahly (Raspaud and Lachheb, 2014) . The rivalry between Zamalek and Al Ahly become an important reflection of the post-independence



political struggles between the monarchists and the Arab nationalist which eventually cumulated in the Egyptian revolution of 1952. The public alignment and involvement of political leaders with football teams was a departure from the colonial policy of indirect administration that allowed a degree of autonomy in football. Football remains a central space for expressing, contesting and negotiating political, economic, cultural and social realities in military ruled Egypt (under President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi), where human rights violations are part of the everyday fabric. The role of football in challenging authoritarianism in contemporary Egypt is tied to the emergence of Ultras. Close (2021) argues that the Ultras—the Ultras Ahlawy also known as UA07 (affiliated to Al Ahly) and Ultras White Knights (affiliated to Zamalek)—are the most radical and vocal fandom groups which speak truth to power in the Egyptian authoritarian society. For instance, in 2011, at a time of increasing disgruntlement in the country as Hosni Mubarak's 30-year regime prepared to install his son Gamal as successor to the family throne, the Ultras became a bastion of robust activism and resistance against Mubarak (Close, 2021).

With regards to West Africa, the direct involvement of post-independence political leaders in football was mostly evident in the context of Ghana. Darby (2013) contends that at independence Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party, saw football as an important ingredient in nation building. Central to Nkrumah's use of football was the role of the Ghanaian national football team, which he christened the 'the Black stars', which he saw not only as a vehicle to unify Ghana under his version of nationalism but also, he saw it as playing an ambassadorial role to promote African unity (Darby, 2013; Pannenberg, 2010). The triumph of the team at the 1963 and 1965 Africa Cup of Nations finals was in fact linked to Nkrumah's presence and support while its dismal performances afterwards were attributed by some to the coup that deposed him in 1966 (Alegi, 2010; Pannenberg, 2010). Like in King Farouk Egypt Nkrumah aligned himself publicly to a particular football club that represented his nationalistic political interests, the Real Republicans Football club. However, like in Egypt opposing political forces also aligned with a rival football club Asante Kotoko, and used it as an avenue to express their political dissatisfaction with Nkrumah's government. Asante Kotoko embodied the ethnic nationalistic aspirations of the Ashanti, who were increasingly marginalized during Nkrumah's presidency, the rivalry between the Real Republicans and Asante Kotoko reflected the regno-ethnic post-independent Ghanaian struggles which ultimately resulted in the overthrowing of the Nkrumah government in 1966 and the eventual disbanding of the Real Republicans (Darby, 2013; Fridy & Brobbey, 2009).

In the context of Nigeria, the period after independence from Britain in 1960 was characterized by ethno-political tensions between the three dominant ethnic groups the Yoruba in the west, the Igbo in the east and the Hausa -Fulani in the North, these tensions cumulated in the Nigerian civil war fought by the federal government and the breakaway Igbo dominated Biafra republic between 1967 and 1970 (Doron, 2011). Its critical to appreciate that the foundation to these ethnic tensions were laid in the colonial, where British entrenched regino-ethnic differences (Doron, 2011). In the case of the Igbo, it was the British colonial practices that constructed a unified Igbo identity among various groups in central and southeastern Nigeria (Onwumechili, 2014). Enugu Rangers football club was formed in 1970 in the aftermath



of the war and quickly become a convergence point for Biafran Igbo nationalism (Onwumechili, 2014). The founders of the club Jerry Enyazu and Nwadiogwu were both former officers in the Biafran army, with the name 'Rangers' being derived from a unit in the Biafran army, in the period following the civil war Rangers maintained an unspoken policy of only recruiting players of Igbo ethnicity in a bid to maintain a pure Igbo identity (Onwumechili, 2014). Like Asante Kotoko in Ghana and Al Ahly in Egypt discussed above, Enugu Rangers in Nigeria embodied the ethnic aspirations of the marginalized Igbo, and their ultimate hopes of an independent successful Igbo nation. Enugu Rangers matches also provided an important space where Igbos could legally gather and express their grievances against the Nigerian state, as well as a platform to symbolically defeat their rivals like Shooting Stars Football club comprised mostly of Yorubas (Onwumechili, 2014).

In the case of Zimbabwe when the nationalist ZANU PF regime assumed political control in 1980, the new state was conscious of the role of football in promoting both hegemonic and counter- hegemonic discourses. The ZANU PF regime like in Nkrumah's Ghana sought to harness the popularity of football to promote its nationalistic vision, part of this strategy involved infiltrating the administration of football, from 1980 almost every member of the Zimbabwe Football Association's executive had some links with ZANU (Zenenga, 2012). The experience of Ghana is very similar to that of Zimbabwe. Choto and Chiweshe (2022) note that this is direct involvement of political officials in football administration represented a departure from the arrangement in colonial Rhodesia, where the political authorities gave space and autonomy to African football administrators. The role of football in the construction and promotion of Zimbabwean nationalistic discourses is also emphasized in literature. Nyambi (2018) argues that one of the fundamental issues confronting the political elite at independence in 1980 was the need to create a national identity out of an ethnically and racially fractured geo-political space that would both legitimize and perpetuate their political hegemony. The identity that emerged in post-colonial Zimbabwe was one of the promotion and valorization of liberation warriorship and heroism which the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) invokes foregrounding the nation's debt to the party. Football from independence to date has become a major feature of commemorating important national days on Zimbabwe's calendar such as Heroes Day, Independence Day, Defense Forces Day and Unity Day (Ncube, 2014a, 2014b; Willems, 2013; Zenenga, 2012). The political elite, by combining football and these political celebrations sought to tap into the social popularity of football to increase their visibility and amplify their audience (Chiweshe, 2016).

However, like in Nigeria the period following the attainment of independence from Britain in 1980, was followed by an ethno-regional conflict between the two nationalist parties, the ruling ZANU mostly comprised of the Shona and ZAPU mostly comprised of the Ndebele. The new state was confronted by many challenges including ethno-regional political tensions between the two nationalist movements, Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) who mostly identified with the Shona speaking people and Zimbabwe African People's Union party (ZAPU) who mostly identified with the Ndebele speaking people (Choto et al., 2017). These tensions eventually morphed into the *Gukurahundi* which was terrible period of state

repression in the Matebeleland and Midlands provinces from 1980 to 1987. The story of Gukurahundi is complex and multifaceted but significantly it was about the political annihilation of ZAPU and its supporters in the targeted province (Ndlovu 2019). Football became entangled in these tensions and became a crucial platform for expressing dissent Stuart (1995:) notes that.

“The post-independent political tensions in Zimbabwe were reflected in the rivalry between Dynamos FC and Highlanders FC, these are the two top clubs in Zimbabwe, based in two principal rival cities (Harare and Bulawayo) of which the two nationalistic political parties ZANU and ZAPU have adopted the respective clubs as ways of identifying with masses of each city.”

Like Enugu Rangers in Nigeria Highlanders in Zimbabwe embodied the ethnic nationalistic aspirations of the politically marginalized Ndebele as well as providing a vehicle of Ndebele expression as well the Ndebele experiences like the Gukurahundi and resisting Shona triumphalism (Guzura and Ndimande 2015, Ncube, 2018). The Gukurahundi disturbances ended in December 1987 with the signing of the ‘unity accord’ between ZANU and ZAPU which effectively resulted in the submerging of ZAPU by ZANU. The 1987 unity accord has been described as an act of peace without reconciliation, in the sense that while the violence against the people in Matebeleland stopped, their grievances were not addressed (Mashingaidze 2005). The aftermath of the unity accord saw the formation of political pressure groups notable among those is the Mthwakazi Republic Party (MRP), whose political agenda is the secession of the territory of the pre-colonial Ndebele state from Zimbabwe. The rationale being the continued political and socio-economic marginalization of the Ndebele by the ruling Shona’. The MRP see football as an ideal platform for projecting images and their version of Ndebele nationalism. Highlanders FC because of its history and significance provides a ready-made vehicle for the MRP to articulate and promote their political views (Ncube, 2018).

The subversive role of football in Zimbabwe extended beyond the Shona- Ndebele conflict. The main political challenger to ZANU PF the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) appropriated football symbols such as whistles and red cards as part of their political strategy to oppose ZANU PF (Zenenga, 2012; Ncube, 2014a, 2014b; Chiweshe, 2016). Through utilizing football symbolism in their political struggle, the opposition MDC revived the role that football had played during the colonial period, as an instrument in the struggle against a repressive political order. Since football lies at the very heart of the popular culture in Zimbabwe particularly in urban areas, this utility of football codes, metaphors and symbols helped the MDC party enhance its political visibility (Zenenga, 2012). Football on the part of the MDC thus represented an important avenue to market its political ideology. This was more pronounced in the invoking of football language to symbolize its political struggle against ZANU PF; like in a football match the red card adopted by the MDC in its political campaigns articulated the imminence of the realization of its political objective of ousting ZANU PF from power in the process rejuvenating its energies towards the realization of this goal. The red card symbol also communicated the gross errors and political offences that had been committed by ZANU PF, just as is the case in a football match a player shown the red card for serious

foul play, violent conduct, handling the ball and denying the opposition a clear goal scoring opportunity, so too did ZANU PF from the perspective of the opposition deserve to be sent off from the political field because of its violence and refusal to admit opposition electoral victories (Zenenga, 2012). The football stadia just as was the case in colonial Rhodesia have also been transformed into spaces of resisting the political hegemony of the ruling political establishment. Muponde and Muchemwa (2011) argue that the appropriation of football symbols by the MDC as political currency, soon found expression in the terraces with MDC sympathizers finding safety in the crowds waved anti ZANU PF gestures and openly expressed their support for MDC and critiqued the political status quo.

In the case of Kenya like in Nigeria, the British colonial practices of divide and rule imposed racial and ethnic segregation, in the process solidifying ethnic identities, which have since become a key variable in political mobilization Waliaula and Okong'o (2014). Ethnic identity played an important role in post independent Kenyan politics with the main nationalistic parties the Kenya National Union (KANU) being an alliance of the Kikuyu and the Luo ethnic groups, whilst its rival the Kenya Democratic Union (KADU) was a counter alliance of the Kalenjin, Maasai, Turkana and Samburu ethnic groups (Njororai, 2009). Ethnic identity where also a key ingredient in the post-colonial football rivalries with the biggest clubs AFC leopards being associated with the Luhya and Gor Mahia with the Luo. The Luo and the Luhya have been largely marginalized from political power and find in football an avenue for asserting their ethnic identity (Njororai, 2009). Like in Nigeria and Zimbabwe discussed above politically marginalized ethnicities have found in football a useful platform to mobilize and articulate versions of ethnic nationalism.

Just like the colonial empire, politicians and governments in post- colonial Anglophone Africa have appropriated football as an instrument to control the people (Pannenberg, 2010) . Appiah (1992) argues that the attainment of independence by African nations does not mean the end of colonialism; the colonial is far from being dead. Nationalistic movements took advantage of social and cultural significance of football teams to articulate their versions of nationalism. At independence the nationalist regimes sought to utilise football as part of their nation building efforts, this entailed using national football teams to promote ideologies of national unity as well as directly controlling football administrative bodies. However, unwittingly fandom have become key platforms for resistance (Muponde & Muchemwa, 2011; Ncube, 2014a, 2014b).

#### 4 Discussion and Conclusion

The paper reviewed pertinent literature on the relationship of football with nationalism and political resistance in selected countries in Anglophone Africa. The review has illuminated on key arguments in the literature as well as showing connections between literature from colonial and post-independent epochs. Moreover, the review was also interested in the methodological orientations of extant literature. The analysis has demonstrated that most of the studies utilise ethnographic or sociology of sports approaches specifically focusing on every day fans of the game. Focusing

on the everyday experiences of ordinary fans helps to give clarity on previously neglected aspects of everyday fans' experience as they are examined in-depth (Benkowitz and Molna, 2012). Existent studies show that football is a space in which much more than sport happens. However, from our analysis, we observed that most of the studies have a weakness of focusing on 'big' clubs in their analysis. For instance, in Zimbabwe focus revolves around Dynamos FC and Highlanders FC; Al Ahly FC, Zamalek FC (Egypt). In Ghana focus is on teams such as Hearts of Oak and Asante Kotoko. This trend is consistent across both epochs and Anglophone Africa. Future studies could also extend to 'small' teams in order to enrich our analysis and understanding of nationalism and political resistance through fandom.

Moreover, existent literature also focusses on men's football clubs. Female football teams are hardly mentioned. Such a scenario creates an impression that fandom, nationalism and political resistance are generally masculine discourses. We also argue that though located in ethnographic tradition, most of the studies are not longitudinal, but tend to be event driven. Such approaches may deprive researchers from gleaning nuanced insights of the phenomena.

The key arguments emerging from literature is that the British colonial policies of indirect rule and regino-ethnic divide and rule have shaped football and its utility as a mechanism of political control both during the colonial and post-colonial periods. In the colonial period football the British introduced football as a form of social control and acculturation but football came with unintended political consequences. Football became an important space for the promulgation and marketing of anti-colonial nationalistic discourses. In fact, football became central in fighting for rights of the under-privileged during and after British colonial rule in Africa.

Critically literature from both epochs-colonial and post-independence as well as across Anglophone African regions show that the relationship between football and power in colonial Africa reproduced itself in newly-independent African countries (Alegi, 2010; Pannenborg, 2010). This was motivated by the fact that most African countries adopted and modified authoritarian systems of governance which deprived majority freedoms of expression, assembly and association. Inarguably, the literature across selected Anglophone countries illustrate how nationalism and political were evident in football fandom at different periods. The strength of these studies lies in the ability to trace and problematise this relationship from the earliest days when football was exported during and after the scramble and partition of Africa. Studies have indicated that the British wanted to use football as an instrument to 'naturalise' colonialism. However, football was appropriated by the colonised and exploited to resist and challenge power in most parts of Africa. This shows that the subalterns or Africans were not led by the nose but also liked and utilised sport for their emancipation (Ncube, 2014a, 2014b). From the literature, it is critical to note that football was also divided along regional and ethnic lines as a consequence of the policy of divide and rule, this regino-ethnic division of football manifested in football club rivalries which also assumed political agency in the face of post-colonial political authoritarianism and marginalization. These emerging political problems in post -colonial Africa resulted in football being utilised as a vehicle by opposition groups for political resistance and promulgation of anti-nationalist political messaging. Such colonial legacies are also evident in fandom patterns in Anglophone

Africa. These ethnic-based soccer clubs therefore can be perceived as an effective means for maintaining a voluntary seclusion which keeps the ethnic group together and at times protesting against the state (Ben-Porat, 2001; Njororai, 2009). We also note that due to regionalism and ethnicity problems fuelled by colonial experience, reviewed literature shows that ethnic nationalisms are more prevalent in football fandom spaces across Anglophone Africa, albeit other versions of nationalism exist. Historians Muzondidya and Ndovu- Gatsheni (2007) blame colonialism for polarizing and reinforcing ethnic divisions among Africans preventing them from developing nationally integrated identities.

We submit that while studies have adequately examined intersections of football fandom, nationalism and resistance in colonial and post-colonial Africa, the phenomenon remains under theorised in the digital age. Online football fandom has become a critical space for engaging in political activism by ‘ordinary’ citizens in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere. Fandom activism has gone to virtual spaces (Close, 2021). Digital media platforms present unprecedented opportunities to diverse fans to participate in heteroglossic carnivals of power that pit “ordinary” people against other “ordinary” people, and ordinary people against the elite (Ncube, 2014a, 2014b). For instance, For instance, as soon as Egypt’s football team crashed out of the World Cup in 2018, a Twitter hashtag #irhalyaSisi (#Sisi\_leave) trended as people protested against the soaring cost of living (Close, 2021). Focusing on Zimbabwe, Ncube and Maposa used online football fandom lens to explore how ordinary Zimbabweans perceive and relate to their men’s senior national football team, the nation and nationalism. The Warriors- Zimbabwe senior men’s national football team performed dismally at the biannual African football extravaganza. Focusing on sentiments expressed on virtual fandom spaces during the 2017 Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON) tournament in Gabon, Ncube and Maposa (2021) show that the national football team’s poor performance triggered a fierce debate on digital spaces. Such debates revolved around questions ‘Who is Zimbabwean?’ and ‘What is Zimbabwe anyway? In a recent study, Ncube (2023) used the case of a white Portuguese coach, Paulo Jorge Silva to explore intersections of nativism and football fandom in Zimbabwe’s online spaces. Silva was appointed as coach of Zimbabwe’s most popular PSL team Dynamos FC in 2016. However, positive results eluded the team under Silva, prompting his dismissal. A critical discourse analysis of online vitriol targeting Silva during his tenure at Dynamos FC shows how the political rhetoric of the ZANU-PF government, specifically its ‘anti-imperial’ discourses interfaces with digital football fandom in Zimbabwe (Ncube, 2023). Digital fandom remains intertwined with resistance and political discourses in Africa. Papacharissi (2002) argues that online platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs and online newspapers offer the public or citizens a public space to produce a public opinion. Future studies should focus on online fandom, nationalism and political resistance in Africa.

This meta-analysis of literature on football fandom, nationalism and resistance has demonstrated that a number of players and actors are central in fighting authoritarianism in Anglophone Africa. Football is one of the actors in the struggles against authoritarian systems where protests are not condoned. However, there is a tendency to trivialize the role and contribution of fandom cultures in Africa in struggles for human rights and democracy. For instance, the Egyptian case has demonstrated

that Ultras became “the second largest civic organization in Egypt, succeeded only by the Muslim Brotherhood movement” (Close, 2021:29). This study extends the neo-Gramscian approach which challenges perspectives which treat popular culture (including sport) as a site where only governing authorities exercise their dominance. Popular culture is an arena for consent and resistance, where hegemony arises and can be secured (Hall, 1981:239). Importantly, underlining the process of hegemony are lateral power struggles. Gramsci (1971) contends that hegemony is a form of social control grounded in the consent and willing participation of the governed; it is an alternative to coercion as a means of governing a society. Hegemony can be negotiated but equally challenged in the realm of popular culture. The concept of hegemony seems to describe a series of football games in which both sides play and only one side can win. From this perspective, hegemony in this sense is about power struggles as the dominant class seeks to gain legitimacy while subaltern groups will be eager to subvert the status quo (Gramsci, 1971). We have demonstrated how subaltern groups appropriated and deployed football images and symbols to ridicule and challenge power in Anglophone Africa. Critically, the study has demonstrated even in authoritarian Anglophone Africa, football fandom is imbued with an aura of subaltern resistance which deconstructs power.

## Declarations

**Conflict of Interest** The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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