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Young Kings: Marcus Rashford and Theopolitical Charisma

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ABSTRACT

In the aftermath of the UK loss in the 2020 Euro Football Cup, I analyze a theopolitical force of contemporary black football players, as a sovereignty from below epitomized by the figure of Marcus Rashford. Given his meteoric rise in British culture and his prominent social activism against child hunger, Rashford, among the other targets of racial abuse, is a particularly apt exemplar. By integrating anthropological ideas on theopolitics, totemism, charisma, and the sacrality of substance, this paper asks how the iconography, life histories, and social media interventions of young, kingly, Black (mainly Christian) athletes, effect a theopolitical force as an elastic movement of self-referentiality and sovereignty from below that is agonistic rather than antagonistic to the state. Specifically, it explores how these black footballers enliven an exemplar of theopolitical sovereignty that does not decide on letting live or making it die, but on doing a work of undoing injustice.

KEYWORDS

Charisma; iconicity; Football Euro Cup; Marcus Rashford; sovereignty; theopolitics; elasticity

A few days after the 2020 Football Euro Cup final held in London in July 2021, I texted a black and white photograph of four British players to my son, Kamau.[1,2] The image, which had been circulating on social media, was rendered black and white from the original colored one. Four of the five players are recognizable, while one, Ben Chilwell, has his back turned to the camera. The image captures a shared moment of reflection during a pitch inspection. Hands in the pockets of their national team uniforms, the players project an aura of quiet mastery. On the left, Marcus Rashford, shoelaces undone, towers pensively, while in front of him and slightly to his left, Raheem Sterling, shorter, gazes with intensity beyond the frame. Jadon Sancho stands beside Rashford, a half-smile on his face lightening the mood as he speaks to Chilwell (facing back to the camera). On the far right, Bukayo Saka stands relaxed, air pods in like Rashford, mouth closed, gaze down, legs slightly open signaling a firmness onto the ground. This serendipitous composition, showcasing four key Black British players, becomes even more powerful as an iconic picture once it circulates on social media during the

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[2]This work was not support by a funding body and there are no competing interests to declare.

racist attacks unleashed on Rashford, Sancho, and Saka, who missed penalty kicks in the final against Italy. When I sent the image to my 19-year-old son, born in England of Italian and Ghanaian heritage, he texted back with the epitaphic line: "Young Kings."

In this paper, I reflect on what the nature of this youthful, Black, kingly power may be. I must note at the outset that I am not an expert on football. However, as an anthropologist interested in political theology, I am invested in understanding the potency of images and the materialities of power as they intersect and construct forms of sovereignty that are circulated, enhanced, and effaced through young Black athletes, and I argue that a theopolitical lens may help us in this. Moreover, I am also personally invested in the affective complexity of this debate as it resonates across a racialized multibillion dollar football industry into the personal intimacy of everyday kinship, my own family, and race relations.

Marcus Rashford enlivens a theopolitical charisma animated by a sovereign force that undoes a failed welfare economy of the state and goes well beyond it. But what do I mean here by "theopolitical charisma" and a lens of theopolitics? Recent work on the intersection of social-cultural anthropology and theology has foregrounded theopolitics as an important area of attention.[3] Theopolitics focuses on the regimes of invisible that inform powers in the threshold of life and death, presence and absence beyond unhelpful divides of secular reasoning (Hollywood 2016). While to a certain degree, anthropological studies of political authority have been taken inspiration from a political theological model of a body Leviticus, a Kantorowickz's king's two bodies—divine and immanent at the same time, theopolitics instead pays more attention to the theological sensoria (both enabling and terrorizing) of political theatricality and baroque formations, informed by rhythms, tautology, and elasticity (de Abreu 2021).

Theopolitics is inspired by the work of Martin Buber and is an apt lens for focusing on the social, cultural, and historical space whether Theos is manifested and withdraws, in an oscillatory movement. This create forms of powers that are "elastic," tautological and self-referential, and in this particular case of Black athletes, enlivened by an emphasis on body inscriptions and humbling self-narratives. A theopolitical oscillation manifests in spaces of vulnerability (Caputo and Keller 2007), in moments of indecision, of reversals and refusal of the law, not in the name of a transcendent God, but instead, in the name of an ever provisional and immanent state of the Law (McAllister and Napolitano 2020, 2021). Moreover, theopolitics does not center its strength in a comparative frame of anthropological studies on political authority (e.g., Graeber, and Sahlins 2017)—where comparison is taken as an intrinsic anthropological depth-value against generalist theories (Van der Veer 2016)—while focusing instead on the shades of sovereignty nested within moments of (in)decision and vulnerably. Martin Buber highlighted that theopolitics is deeply connected to a triangulation of history, politics, and religion and as such is always de-linked from land as a privileged "ancestral" claim to a root, but it is constantly

[3]Theopolitics is one strand of the bourgeoning dialogical relation of Anthropology with Theolog(ies). Works by Joel Robbins and Derrick Lemons have brought forward issues of ethical, anthropological, engagement with theology and a charting of a possible grammar of connectivity, yet have missed the constitutive place that Christian theology has in colonial violence (Oliphant 2021) and the way in which it has been coopeted in, or has been the engine of debatable State reconciliatory governance. Theopolitics, instead, putting questions of radical justice and incarnation at its core is more in line with feminist and abolitionist critiques within a work to unfold an anthropology beyond it troubling roots in the liberal settlement (Mazzarella 2019)—a current debate that has inspired young scholars to call for letting anthropology burn (Jobson 2020).

re-generated by it (Buber and Scheimann 1967). For Buber, the theopolitical is a covenant between God and the People, where charisma is not tied to a transcendental and hereditary-like sovereignty, but to an ever provisional, immanent form of seeking justice—a theopolitical force is for him a "religious-political" act within, not outside history (ibid, 64,126). Hence, how could we apprehend these young players as animated through a lens of theopolitics?

Rashford, Sterling, Saka, and Sancho are part of a football industry that relies not only on their athletic skills, but on the mediatic reproduction of their iconic Black bodies. From a political theological angle, the economy in which their images are enmeshed, capitalizes on a constant mediatization of hyper-wealth as well as (particularity in the case of Rashford, on whom I center this article), bottom-up practices for just societal redistribution. At just 24 years of age, Marcus Rashford's contributions off the pitch, specifically toward ending child hunger, have earned him an MBE, a Pride of Britain award, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Manchester. This is in stark contrast to the racial attacks he endured on social media following England's Euro Cup loss, which was also marked by a major defacement of Rashford's portrait-mural on Copson Street in Manchester shortly after the game. Other racially abused graffiti and social media were also directed at Sancho and Saka in the wake of the English team's loss. Understanding this Black athletic power through a political theological lens foregrounds some of the complexity of racialized contemporary youth charisma. Some of these players, such as Sancho, Sterling, and Rashford indeed, grew up in Christian families and sensibilities. Yet a perspective on Christian ethics and charity does not fully explain the iconographic force performed by these Black athletes, particularly where they have galvanized a reversal of governmental policies.

An analysis of press coverage, podcast interviews, and social media responses to the racial abuse directed at the Black football players following England's loss, shows an array of diverse public and media interventions. Taking the knee before the game was, for instance, criticized by the conservative Home Secretary, Preti Patel, justifying a right of English fans to boo this "gesture politics" (Stone 2021). What emerges through mediatic interventions, when interrogated through a political theological lens, chart the charismatic force of these Black footballers (in particular Marcus Rashford) that undoes the law, push for a u-turn when state-law may have a final and sovereign nature. A Christian exemplar, Rashford enlivens a condition of sovereignty that refuses a (failed) subsidiary of the (British) state and instead incarnates a "kingly" and state-like sovereignty that does not decide on letting live or making it die, in a Foucauldian sense, nor decide, in a Schmittian way, how law distributes justice in the name of its exception. Instead, it is a sovereignty that revolves around *doing a work of undoing injustice*.

Marcus Rashford, Jadon Sancho, and Raheem Sterling are English players born in, or of first- and second-generation Caribbean and Nigerian descent. Rashford and Sancho's families are part of the Windrush generation in the UK—a generational cluster that cannot be confined to a simple and homogenized reading. Yet, thinking of them as "Young Kings" is also to think of a sovereignty rooted in their familial experience of Caribbean migration into Britain, and its enduring traces and obliterated archives (Navaro 2020). Traces are both a methodological and analytical lens through which to better understand the complexities of "returns." Analytics of return show paradoxes as, on the one hand, reinforcing existing values of and in the metropolis, yet potentially doing so

in ways that can be perceived as unorthodox or nearly "heretic" (a classic case of this paradox is the complex figure of Francis as a Criollo Pope as "returning" from the Americas to the heart of Catholicism in Rome, Napolitano 2019). Paradoxes then may well emerge in Atlantic traces, and in ways in which "minority" subjects and their desires give life, yet also undo a hegemonic, racialized and continuously changing *dispositif* of British civilization, sovereignty, and colonial heritage (Foucault 1980; Napolitano 2015).

As a second-generation Caribbean English man, Rashford is a particularly interesting figure, because he is mediatically linked to luxury brands (such as Burberry), while simultaneously perpetuating self-narratives of his "down to earth" origins and present-day interactions. In many interviews, Rashford comes across as a young player very attached to and made of the locality in which he grew up, Wythenshawe—a place that together with Moss Side is stereotypically associated with being one of the most underprivileged areas of greater Manchester, and Britain altogether. Characterized predominately by a strong working-class culture and an immigrant community with intense local identification and strong social bonds, life in Wythenshawe has been described as "constantly negotiated," where strong mothers' networks are an ongoing antidote to a chronic lack of state welfare support (Valencia Galvez 2013, 49). Through the words and the deeds of Rashford, the neighborhood of Wythenshawe (hosting one of the larger Council Estates in Britain) has become a central node for the player's allegiance to the city and the Manchester United team.

Rashford has made major national and international news in a short span of a few years, in particular for twice eliciting a reversal of Boris Johnson's and the conservative government's political decisions. The first instance, which occurred in early 2020, pertained to the suspension in the governmental provision of free lunches and vouchers for children of low-income families during the COVID restrictions. The second and related occurred later that same year, whereby Rashford sought to undo the government's unwillingness to extend food support during the school holidays. Before this, in the greater Manchester area, Rashford teamed up with the NGO FareShare and organized a food scheme in support of low-income families and homeless people. He then mobilized a national petition: "End child food poverty—no child should be going hungry" (UK Government Petition 2021). In the end, Johnson "bowed to the better judgment of the 23-year-old footballer" (Guardian 2020). Johnson had to reverse the government decision under the pressure of a growing public shame cultivated by targeted national and international broadcast attention (New York Times 2021).

Marcus Rashford has narrativized his childhood in very ordinary ways: spending most of his time after school "kicking the football ball," together with a tight and trusted group of friends. Paradoxically, "surviving" early life in a British Council Estate has often been described as a purposeful act of not engaging in the life of the Estate itself. Rashford's childhood is marked by the presence of his mother, Melanie Maynard, a single mother of five, devotedly Christian, who worked long hours to support the family, holding it together in remarkable, yet ordinary ways. Totemically speaking, the life of Rashford depicts a common act of family "sacrifice" in which a young athlete is "given up" at very young age to enter the Manchester United Academy. A totemic family sacrifice is constitutive of the life of many English prospective professional footballers hoping that early engagement will result in playing in the pro league. Football academies eventually feed their best players into a multibillion football industry. The professionalization

of very young players, and their family's sacrifice to give life to the totem/football team is not only confined to football, of course, but is shared by other competitive and professional sports. However, as I set up to ask in the opening of this article, about the nature of young, Black, kingly sovereignty, here it entails not only a root in an act of family sacrifice for a renewed totemic life. In the case of Rashford, the young king's body becomes central to it, as itself is a life-reminder, and a canvas of sensuous, baroque similarities (Benjamin and Osborne 1998).

Rashford has a tattoo on his left obliques of himself as a young boy, standing in front of the house in the neighborhood where he grew up, a football ball next to him, a glimpse of a (football) field to the side. The tattoo is indexical of a mimetic, incarnated relation to his own history, to his house and the ground on which he played as a young child. This tattoo reminds him of his simple origins, the care of his mother and the family who helped him growing up into the footballer he now is—a reminder of a "humble" past. Yet, this tattoo is also an inscription, a form of incision on the skin, of his child being onto himself. That incision gives him strength by being an incarnated reminder of the family, neighborhood, and the very ground which produced him. Rashford in interviews has never stressed the uniqueness of his agency, but instead he articulates his own life as a nourishing germination from below in an elastic exercise of referentially onto himself. If a notion of "production" is itself the secularization of a theological concept (of God creating the universe *ex nihilio)* (Descola 2013), then a production of life through a specific ground and soil has potential theological reverberations. In this case, it is an index of "kingly" powers inspired not by coercion of other subjects (in an antagonistic way), but as the producing medium of beneficial, awe-inspiring largess, display, and prosperity (Graeber and Sahlins 2017, 15). Yet this particular formation of Rashford, and other successful black players, as "Young Kings" "from below" is still constituted in tension with a neoliberal economy that capitalizes on social media interaction, star attraction, and branding influencers.

In recounting his history, Rashford does not depict himself as a "bearer" or as a recipient of state support, nor was there any sense of stigmatization in accepting free school meals. He has often remarked that he has never understood how others may have seen it that way. For him, the centrality of the family history and the locality which produced him is entirely without stigma and is, instead, the force that allowed him to pursue his childhood dream to become a footballer for Manchester United. Rashford's Christian faith, which was central to his Kittian grandmother and mother, together with his profound identification with the urban locality of Wythenshawe, puts in motion a force that is moved by a "ground" where, in his words, one starts life "twenty meters behind." He is in this way a subject inhabiting a threshold, and who does encourage to do so: "if you're not outside of your comfort zone you are doing something wrong" (Rashford and Anka 2021, 79). Moreover he explains:

> I like, I was just the voice of people that didn't agree with it. And then I just basically said it. And then they open their eyes and they see that maybe he's got a point and then that's where the change comes from. So, I'm not against government or anything, I said this at the beginning of everything that is nothing to do with politics or me against the government. It's just like … if they see the things that I've seen … in my community or in communities around the country, there's no way they'd made the decisions that they made. So, I just give them an insight, a voice like, and that was, that's my main reason for … writing a letter for the first U-

> turn. That's why I wrote the letter. Because that was the only way for them to see what it's really like. And I believe that once they understood it, they would change their decision, and they did … . And then it just like escalated, so quickly. And you know, before I knew it, it was the country and then like not long after that I've got people that I've met through football and sports from other countries that want to do the same in other countries. So, then it becomes like a global thing, and I'm still sort of in the process of, you know, giving that information to other people so that they can start to do the same thing (Manchester United Official Podcast 2020).

Here, I am particularly interested in the theopolitical force that is enlivened by Rashford as a form of "sovereignty from the ground,"—from a specific locality, but which is not perceived as "political." This is a sovereignty which is doing the work of undoing injustice by responding to a fixity of the law and asking for its reversal toward renewed forms of living together. A theopolitical power is one of performing and orienting an undoing from the ground of a state law (in the case of Rashford, of Boris Johnson's decision to withdraw food support). It is a political sovereignty that, in everyday life, recalibrates power and the law by undoing injustice, rather than seeing itself as doing justice.

A modality of this undoing develops through a rhythm of action, a repetitive listening from and through the ground. In reflecting on the homeless people, he encountered growing up in Wythenshawe, Rashford explains:

> So, there was just things like that I'd seen growing up. I know this is the one that people speak about … what I've done this year, but there are things that I do every, every year. And even … sometimes I just used to go into town and just speak to them, because for a lot of them, they just want someone to speak to. And they just want someone to listen, basically. And that's what people don't understand sometimes. So, it's a difficult area to try and help homelessness because it's so much a detail amongst [us]. And once you understand that, and you respect that, they don't just want help … they want someone to listen to them and just let them have a voice and have an opinion. And I think as people, we have to respect that. (Ibid 2020)

The kingly nature of Marcus Rashford is not antagonistic to the British state, nor does it operate by actively interrupting and disavowing a form of (mis)recognition of specific people, in the eye of a government or a state (Simpson 2014). Rashford's kingly nature unfolds, instead, by a faith in nourishment, which becomes a means of exerting pressure on the government to reverse a decision to cut food support. In other words, it creates indecision in the primary site (the government/state) of exertion of sovereignty, in its capacity to decide on the state of exception. It is a doing that opens new political action from a space of vulnerability and "in-decision" of the law. Nourishment extends well beyond biology to other forms of incarnated connection and relations as to " forms of sharing fleshy substance with other living being" (Mol 2021). Conceptually and practically, nourishment as enabled by the king-like nature of a young Black British footballer effects a form of entanglement and transformative dependence rooted in particular and singular practices.[4] Rashford's theopolitical force of animating an attention to the injustice of a governmental withdrawal of food support for an already underprivileged population during a very critical time of the COVID pandemic is a life-sustaining

[4]A well-known example of a sportsman's singular practice is the taking of the knee originally by black American football player, Colin Kaepernick to which I have referred above.

labour. And this life-sustaining labour, part of his theopolitical force, unfolds as an extension of (his) family and locality.

Public reaction to the defacement of Rashford's mural, as well as the racial attacks on Sancho and Saka in response to their missed penalties against Italy in the European final was supportive and emphatic. Hundreds of people attended the site, leaving messages and gifts in recognition. Against an economy of defacement that through a violent act unmasks the raw power of an ongoing racial project (Gagliardi 2020), some Manchester city fans and ordinary citizens waved a tapestry of paper messages, taped onto the black plastic sheet that covered the racial abuses painted overnight: "We will never let's the haters win, you are a hero, Marcus, thanks," "BLM," "Roaring Lions," "This is more than a game, this is a man's life," "We got your back," "Rashford for PM," "I can take or leave football but I cannot take or leave people like you. Thank you for your passion and compassion and desire to change lives." The overall tone stressing the heroic dimension of Rashford and the "three kings", inspired a community against hate. Shortly thereafter, a large digital mural of Kaka, Rashford, and Sancho appeared in Trafford sponsored by Sport Bible. It portrays the three players in their national team uniforms looking down at the viewer. A drawn, kingly crown appears on each of their heads, and the epitaph: "Never apologize for who you are" appears under the image (Football Origin 2021).

An element of Rashford's theopolitical nature emerges as an extension of his own's imaginary dialogue with his 10-year-old self (Burberry 2020). This "kingly" force is as theopolitical as it is tautological—tautologies have a political weight (Wittgenstein 2013). In the context of charismatic revivalism in Brazil studied by Maria José de Abreu, tautologies pronounced by charismatic leaders such as "the acts of the apostles is the acts of the apostles," or "it is what it is," index a particular force of language that is pneumatic, that oscillates between opposites without a sovereign position external to it that decides (in a Schmittian sense) upon the state of exception: "such a self-referential power arrangement is symptomatic of regimes whose model of sovereignty no longer relies on decision as the index of a transcendental outside" (Abreu 2020, 54). This interpretation of tautological modalities informs neo-populist phenomena such as the Trump and the Bolsonaro rhetorical regimes. Yet, the case of Rashford, in the wake of the horrible racial abuse following the football final, indexes an existing and parallel theopolitical tautological domain embedded in a self-referentially: "I am a black man, and I live everyday proud that I am" (Rashford 2021a). This is a self-referentiality that builds from a germinating ground, rather than an elasticity of pneuma. In that sense, theopolitical charisma can reproduce both very totalitarian and/or conservative political regimes, as well as possibilities for an otherwise of politics from an elasticity that con-constitute bodies and localities.[5]

To recapitulate then, Rashford and the "Young Kings" unfold a theopolitical charisma that *does the work of undoing injustice*. This charisma puts in motion a sovereignty from the ground and locality that challenges a top-down notion of sovereignty (God and state alike), but does so through a kind of negation, as it were, in a name of "undoing," rather than doing, through what are ordinary, local dynamics. Because of its theopolitical force,

[5]The latter is the case of "Brexit means Brexit" a tautology used by Conservative MP and then British Prime Minister, Theresa May, after the Brexit referendum in 2016.

it acquires unexpected strength (see a David and Goliath parallel between Johnson and Rashford). Moreover, this charisma springs from an elasticity in the iconography of these Black athletes that, at least in the case of Rashford, folds over onto the self, and by so doing orients toward an undoing of injustice, exerting pressure for the reversal of governmental policies with rippling effects across the entire nation, well beyond the Mancunian locality.

Rashford's humbling force undoes perspectives of racist and classist portraits of the life of an Estates in England and the stigma attached to free school meals. Yet, he does not directly condemn such views but articulates that he did not and still does not understand those views to start with. Instead of emphasizing (class) distinction, Rashford highlights the strengths of the area. In a letter that is part of the Burberry-Rashford initiative, Rashford notes the proximity between people in the community of his upbringing and their ability to "wrap our arms around each other and tug each other up at times we are feeling low," and adding, "Always remember that kindness is power" (Burberry 2020). The letter accompanied an unveiling of another mural in Manchester: a composition of three interlocking Rashford selves.

In December 2021, a giant mural by British artist Jazz Grant was revealed on St. Thomas St, central Manchester. This mural is a composition of three stages of Rashford's life. The young player in the middle, low-cut hair, with a warm youthful smile is dressed in a black football shirt; on his left an older teenaged Rashford appears dressed in a blue and white checkered shirt that begins to signal the iconic Burberry motif. This is painted over the present of an absence: a faceless Rashford appearing as a Black model of whom we can only follow the contour of his broad left shoulder dressed, in a light blue designer jacket with the brown floral theme. To the far right in the current day Rashford, towering and looking directly at the viewer. In the background appears what could be the house in Wythenshawe where he grew up. The current representation of Rashford is wrapped in a Burberry brand house scarf: white, red, and black checkered fabric. He is wearing a relaxed sporty outfit, his gaze resolutely directed at the viewer, standing in his calm and kingly strength. The Burberry cloth enshrines him with power and glamour reminiscent of a "Marian-like" mantel. On the right of the mural are three words of national iconicity: Burberry, London, England. The seriousness, composure, and gravitas of the contemporary Rashford powerfully connect to what was then his youth, in potentia. The sovereignty of the "young king" here emerges from a tautological force of folding onto oneself, a self-referentiality that is generative and, in the mural above at least, trinitarian.

In an ongoing racialized narrative, the footballer's pace, strength, and brute force have been associated with the Black athlete's body, while craft, artistry, and poise continue to be indexed by white athletic bodies. Zoomorphism, sub- and supra-human conditions are recurringly attributed to Black bodies while qualities of the straight human are mainly anchored in whiteness (Burdsey 2020). Moreover, a Durkheimian-like understanding of the affective traction of British football as a "secular sacrament" can also be seen through paths and values of success, failure, and heroism of the players (Adogame, Watson, and Parker 2017, 148). Since iconic figures of Mohammed Ali, much has been written on the relation between Black athletes and the seeking of racial justice (Back and Mills 2021), yet this present reflection hopes to add a perspective on players' charisma as it relates to the law and doing the work of undoing injustice to this ongoing area of reflection.

Rashford's Manchester teammate Raheem Sterling has also garnered support for calling out racism against BAME in sport. Both have called for players not to be sanctioned for, yet not encouraging directly walking off the pitch and explaining this position by arguing that doing so will let racism win (Guardian 2019). Yet, walking off the pitch as an act of negation of playing, can be an act of becoming inoperative (for and in front of a public). Walking off of the pitch in response to racist abuses could also be seen as a kind of "violence without bloodshed," a power of violent and messianic negation (Benjamin 1978) that has the force to overthrow the *legal* system that has conferred its force (the football industry) in the first place.

Elements of trinitarianism and messianism of these "Young Kings" could speak here to a long, but dwindling history of studies on the institutions of divine kingship in anthropology, culled in an understanding of a ritual labour needed to make self-sovereignty endowed with capacities for deification, with and beyond death. Yet, even if more currently divine kingship has been analyzed as unstable formations of a human-divine articulation with unforeseeable effects in social life, my analyses of these "Young Kings" do not fit into these studies since it highlights the instability of the flesh as a constitutive immanent force of the body of the king, not its unwanted or troubling effects.

To conclude, Rashford's phenom does not affect a clear-cut work in the name of justice, an antagonism to the existing law/government. Its success occurs through doing the work of undoing injustice by connecting to a force and authority that comes from a constant mirroring inward, from an elastic self-referentiality that goes back and forth through his personal history and the contemporary moment. It is a history that is inscribed with humility in his social media posts, his interviews, letter writing, and even on his body through his tattoos, as well as through his savvy engagement with luxury fashion brand Burberry. It is also a history that folds in on itself in the portrait murals painted in his honor and the flexible performance of his body on the pitch. This is a theopolitical force through the body that is not sub- or supra-human, but is instead "infra" human—a politics of connecting tissues, an incarnated mimesis of the now-football player (a Black British one of Caribbean decent, who grew up in Wythenshawe) inseparable from and always incarnated into his younger selves and the family relations that have produced him. A working of undoing injustice gains its power through this elastic, incarnated, folding over mimesis, which uses its force to undo Prime Minister Johnson's decision of curtailing meal vouchers' for children in need. What emerges in an act of reversal, not a refusal of the state as such. It is a pressure on the state to meet its own promises. In that sense, the kingly nature of Marcus Rashford is *not an antagonistic confrontation* with the state, but *an agonistic tension* with Boris Johnson's mandate, to better the state, toward what it should be.

So agonism may well be at the bases of a Rashford messianism, if there is one. Beyond Obama's "messianism" *of* hope and service, Rashford seems to stress a messianic faith that is a faith *in*, in people's capacity of undoing in justice (Taubes 2004). This messianism acquires strength through taking risk of trying something anew, yet based on "simple" and everyday acts of life sustenance. In an Obama–Rashford joint interview for a Penguin podcast in the wake of the launching of their respective books in 2021, Obama talks of Rashford's achievements through a trope of service: "And if you decide to go into public service, you know, there you can do that in government, but you can also do it through no-profit organizations that are feeding the hungry or building housing for

folks who don't have it or working in countries that have fewer resources than your own. There are a lot of ways to serve." In what follows, Rashford highlights a faith in finding one's way: " I just started learning that [with] free books you can grow yourself in whichever way you want. And for me as the type of person I am, rather than somebody keeps telling me to do this, and do that, but allows me to just do it my own way. And I feel like, once I learned that about myself, I just never really stopped." In this, once again, Rashford neither openly critiques nor resists state political power, but himself becomes a faith in power's immanent unfolding (Penguin Podcast 2021).

Theopolitically then as a footballer phenome, Rashford incarnates an otherwise of politics from within, underpinned still by a neoliberal, multibillion, stardom football industry. A politics that feeds on and is nourished by a familiar soil, foregrounds food as sharing substance, and enhances localities informed through a tautological rhythm of subjectivity within a life history, as it reverberates through much wider black and working-class histories. Yet, when in the 2021–22 season Rashford weakened his performance, rumors have been that he could become linked to another club, showing that the football neoliberal industry potentially supersedes theopolitical powers and affective histories of ties to a locality. In fact, and together, these "Black Young Kings" are still very much part of circuits of reproduction of desire and consumption—they are also fashion icons. Then this dynamic squares straight into a realm of commodity fetishism—a political realm that obscures life-killing connections between commodity desire, alienation of labor and their root in an ongoing criminalization of Black people and their labor. Perhaps what my son implied in his epitaphic text is that these Black Young Kings do not aim to escape this paradox, but instead, embrace it through their way to rousing to justice.

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Notes on contributor

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