



Making gender count beyond 2010

By Cora Burnett

Abstract

The political rhetoric surrounding the 2010 FIFA World Cup is mediated as an African homecoming in the global embrace of economic and political super powers. The media's role in perpetuating commercial sport, and particularly football, as a male bastion finds expression in the symbolism of this mega sports event. It is largely left to "sport plus" national and international initiatives to promote a more "human face" of football, and to address social issues such as gender equality. Various national studies and hegemonic discourses provide evidence of gender logic in sport that perpetuates the marginalisation of girls and women from grass roots to national level (such as within Banyana Banyana in South Africa). Editors, broadcasting agents and sport journalists should reflect on the gender web they so persuasively weave through exciting stories and beautiful pictures, entrenched in a brotherhood of untouchable supremacy.

Key words

gender, media, sport, FIFA World Cup

Introduction

Much political rhetoric surrounds the hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, echoing the dream of an African Renaissance and vividly capturing the promise of prosperity and the arrival of African nations on the world stage of global co-existence (Aina 1997). This has included espousing the benefits of building of world-class facilities and estimations of an injection of about R1 billion into the local economy through hosting this event. Organisers have profiled professional sport as an influential market force in

international marketing and contributing to the General Domestic Product (GDP) of nation states. However, the envisaged capital gain is mainly in the political engineering of nation building (healing racial divides and redressing class inequalities), and showcasing South Africa and Africa as a continent ready to join the league of the super powers (SASCOC 2005). The inter-play between sport and global forces and the clustering of world powers to cooperate and compete are thus contextualised and expressed by political capital earned

through hosting such prestigious mega sporting events (Harvey and Houle 1994).

Mega sporting events also provide a platform for global movements to advocate for a development agenda. There is evidence of a measure of success in international accomplishments relating to environmental protection (Lenskyj 1998), opposing hegemonic gender power relations, structures and ideology (Birrell 2000; Hall 1996) as well as racial discrimination (Bose 1994; Rees 1996). These global movements very much rely on the media for advocacy and visibility to debate controversial issues (Lee and Maguire 2009). However, such issues would stand little chance of being inherent in the event symbolism, given the symbolic imagery of profiling of African countries coming together in a brotherhood of anti-imperialism as subtext.

The global trend of public spending on “sport for all” or “mass participation,” as well as philanthropy or

Corporate Social Investments (CSI) also found expression in sport for development work. The United Nations’ declaration that 2005 be deemed the International Year for Sport and Physical Education (Resolution 58/5) provided the global, yet separatist recognition for the role of sport as vehicle for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations 2005 and 2006). Gender equity, as encapsulated by the third Millennium Development Goal focusing on the empowerment of women, featured prominently in envisaged outcomes of the German Development Cooperation or Deutsche Gesellschaft for Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) and the Nike’s Sport for Change Network programmes (Burnett and Hollander 2009).

The legacy of the FIFA World Cup as envisaged by Sport and Recreation South Africa (SRSA), the national department in partnership with major international stakeholders such as GTZ in collaboration with multi-national stakeholders including the European Union,



Cora Burnett (with note book) conducting fieldwork

Photo: Cora Burnett

non-governmental organisations and multilevelled government sectors, will be discussed as focusing on rights and development issues. This includes gender inequality, peaceful co-existence (with reference to xenophobia or war torn regions) and the reduction of deviance and anti-social behaviour in impoverished communities of up to 10 selected African countries (GTZ/YDF 2009a). However, the question remains - to what extent will media cover the "do good factor through sport" compared to the "soccer war" waged among the (male) football warriors, in addition to the political significance of recognising African countries as members of the global football community?

It is against this background of the social construction of gender and prioritising it in the sporting context, that the roles of stakeholders, particularly the media, are reflected upon. Sport is a social construct and created by people with power, and thus cannot be viewed or understood in isolation (Burnett 2001). It inevitably reflects broader social issues, influenced by ideologies, discourses, debates and happenings in the wider society. The potential of utilising the 2010-hype for addressing engendered sport in the South African and African context is a complex and interrelated social issue laden with political and cultural baggage and stereotyping in which the media has a key role to play. Just as sport is no homogeneous phenomenon, gender is also a biological and social construct to which individuals are socialised in particular context and historical periods.

The South African scenario of engendered sport

The post-1994 democratic dispensation in South Africa paved the way for addressing gender inequalities at all levels within the corporate and government sectors. The call for equal representation of men and women in decision-making positions found expression in setting first a 30%, and later 50%, women in political leadership for the SADC (South African Development Community) region. South Africa has boasted the best record of accomplishment in the region, reaching 42% women's representation in parliament in 2009. Yet, despite the wide implementation of the Employment Equity (Act 55 of

1998) that endeavours to eradicate the inequalities in the marketplace, race was prioritised and gender-discriminatory practices still persisted (Chisholm and September 2005; Suraj-Narayan 2005).

External forces as much as internal ones contribute to the continued marginalisation of women in the South African sporting arena. Gender equality propagated from international and national forums, protected by the "national bill of rights" and feminist praxis, has done little to address male hegemonic values, structures and discriminatory practices prevailing in society and in sport (Hargreaves 1997; Jones 1998). The under-representation of women in elite sports and the marginalisation of "female" or "Cinderella" sports reflect women's socio-economic positioning and lived realities (Holland-Muter 1995).



Tanzanian Footballer Rose Chipa gets ready for World Cup 2010
Photo: Gender Links

In a national study, *The status of SA women in sport and recreation 1994-2004*, undertaken in the aftermath of ten years of democracy, it was evident that main areas of female disenfranchisement exist in terms of unequal resource distribution, unequal access to power structures, decision-making positions and leadership roles. Qualitative and quantitative data obtained from a purposive sample of 488 research participants in all nine provinces in South Africa, representing 14 different sport and recreation sectors, substantiated the powerful influence of hegemonic masculinity as it was manifested in various structures in the SA sporting fraternity (Burnett 2007a). Research by Pelak (2005) underscores the diversity of gender experiences and expectations in the absence of a common "sisterhood." Yet, despite socio-political, economic and/or racial differences, ideology, cultural beliefs and lack of political will perpetuate discriminatory gender practices. Gender stories should be told and understood in all the nuanced versions of how people are "doing gender" in more "feminine" and traditionally "masculine" sports such as football and rugby (Hartmann-Tews and Pfister 2005).

Women's football mainly began among white women who had relatively greater access to facilities. However, as coloured and black women increasingly formed soccer teams, they started dominating the female soccer scene which is currently stratified along class, racial (being predominantly black) and political affiliation lines (Roberts 1992). As a traditionally male sport, the women's version has always struggled for recognition, funding and against the cultural stereotyping that it is a male sport where the national female squad (Banyana Banyana) is vastly overshadowed by the male squad (Bafana Bafana) (Burnett and Africa 2007). Women's football in South Africa is still to make inroads on the national scene, despite having about 300 registered teams and a structured league system in most of the 25 regions of the South African Soccer Federation (Rulasha 1999; Ndibi 2004).

A real threat to South African women's participation in football relates to the assumptions that stereotype women and girls who play football as "pseudo men" (Clough, McCormack and Traill 1996). Homophobia

seems to be a powerful cultural factor that has, among other things, discouraged many women and girls from playing football (Cox and Thompson 2001). Sports women continually face challenges to resist and transform their sexuality to avoid prejudice and discrimination and find a balance between athleticism and gender (Bartly 1990). This is particularly evident in the widely published media campaign spearheaded by Ria Ledwaba to "feminise" the Banyana Banyana players by grooming them through "etiquette classes that focus on how to walk and talk like women and project themselves in a more feminine way" (Russouw 2005, 2). The gender discourse in football centres on homophobic notions and heterosexual norms (Theberge 2000). This presents a double-edged sword as female players need to present themselves as feminine for wider acceptance, yet forfeit the more masculine traits that could empower them as athletes in the display of physical prowess (Burnett and Africa 2007).

In South Africa, male team sports such as football and rugby continue to receive official sanctioning, and have become powerful symbols of uncontested male supremacy to enhance national prestige and collective identification. The fact that most respondents during research conducted by Rule and Struwig (2005) who indicated that they had a role model or favourite sports person cited male soccer players is further testimony of the engendered space of South African football and sport in general. The lack of media coverage is most certainly linked with the absence of female role models – a phenomenon that is perpetuated by sponsorships and the visibility of male athletes and sports and the main frame of reference (Jones 2005; Burnett 2007a).

The role of the media

Drawing on the content analysis of media studies, in her master's study, Serra analysed the construction of gender through sports reporting in selected South African newspapers (Serra and Burnett 2007). Data collected over a six-month period (1 April 2004 to 30 September 2004) included 2354 images and 5300 articles from *Beeld*, *The Star* and *The Sowetan*, which

showed a clear prioritising of men and male sports (86.5%), while marginalising women and their sports in biased reporting. Male sporting success, role models as sport stars and gender stereotyping in terms of masculine versus feminine representations of athletes, devalued the athletic achievements of female athletes by using cultural and sexual innuendos. It reflected a discourse of masculine hegemony in which journalists defended the reproduction of gender stereotyping, camouflaged as being in the interest of the newspapers and meeting the expectations of the readership.

Several international authors described similar media practices where discursive strategies were profiling engendered subtexts in the celebration of masculinity and male prowess, whilst sexualising women (Knoppers and Elling 2004; Hartmann-Tews and Rulofs 2003). These gender constructions are rooted in a conceptual framework firmly imbedded in patriarchal values of which the input, throughput and media output is a persuasive force in condoning and perpetuating male hegemonic practices in sport. In addition to this state of affairs, commercialised competitive sport is prioritised with all its political and ideological clout. Media coverage in South Africa mainly celebrates sport elitism, especially

for traditionally male-dominated sports, such as football (reflecting "black" consciousness and affiliation), rugby (a predominantly "white" sport) and cricket (Burnett 2007a and b). In the context of South African sports, football or soccer and rugby are recognised as the national sports, the former being perceived, controlled and stereotyped as a sport for the black masses and rugby as the national sport for whites. Boys are socialised into a macho culture of sport according to a collective consciousness of an ethnic cultural identity (Burnett 2001).

As long as they are seen as a women's issue, rather than a mediated societal issue, gender stereotyping and discriminatory practices will go relatively unchallenged (Hall 1996). In turn, this inevitably translates into the under-representation of female participation in sport and structured physical activity as reported in national studies such as that of Rule and Struwig (2005). This study found female participation to be 11.2% against a national average of 25.6%, and a male participation rate of 42.6%. Burnett and Hollander (2008), who conducted a baseline study for the School Sport Mass Participation Programme as a national initiative from Sport and



Little girls do love soccer

Photo: mrfink

Recreation South Africa to bring sport to the masses, found girls to still be disenfranchised. The dropout of girls at school was significantly higher than that for boys, especially in the high school where the average decline for boys from grade eight to grade 12 was from 66% to 17%, compared to girls whose participation declined from 61% to 3% over the similar period.

It seems that despite extensive funding and public initiatives to bring sport and the potential benefits or regular participation to children and girls, the *status quo* largely seems to be unchanged. Dominant structures and exclusionary discourses represent institutionalised gender discrimination that is very difficult to change (Messner 2002). On the one side mass media might resist ideological changes, but on the other hand, a successful women's football team (such as in China), can serve to motivate men's teams to strive for success (Heywood and Dworkin 2003). However, the South African scenario does not afford such cross gender influences.

Public and private initiatives that specifically focus on providing access to structured physical activity and sport to girls and women do not always receive widespread media coverage and go largely unreported in the global and national media. *Sport plus* initiatives (such as structured programmes focusing on also delivering social outcomes such as preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS), would raise public consciousness through publicity and media exposure (Coalter 2007). One of the main initiatives funded by a myriad of stakeholders, including Sport and Recreation South Africa and GTZ/YDF, includes the Peace Caravan Project. In this project, participants from Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa toured the Great Lakes region of Eastern Africa to convey messages of peaceful co-existence, gender inclusion and creating awareness for the 2010 FIFA World Cup (GTZ/YDF, 2009). However, such "sport for good" or *sport plus* initiatives do not receive popular global media recognition comparative to commercialised sport. Again, the issue receiving media attention relates more to the profile of a sport star or politician, than in the possible message s/he might convey.

Caravan Amani (Swahili, meaning Peace Caravan) toured the Great Lakes region of Africa during March 2009 to promote the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Caravan Amani is part of the South African Government's Legacy Campaign and the Sport and Recreation Department's Mass Participation Programme that strives to incorporate the culture of sports and recreation into communities in order to create a legacy beyond the tournament.



The peace caravan team played five a side against volunteers from the audience
Photo: GTZ/YDF

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From the above discussion it is clear that competitive sport has historically been created and mediated by and for men as an arena where macho values are celebrated, and where mainstream sports inevitably implicate male-stream sports (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1983). Media practices for sport are no exception, as they also have to a large extent been structured and created as a hegemonic male social practice underpinned by patriarchal ideology, and as such imbedded in the consciousness of people (men and women) to be accepted as a natural and normative practice (Gruneau 1993). It is thus inevitable that the media would focus on the global and political significance of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, as these themes, images and stories would serve current media discourses and the widely accepted gender logic (Coakley 2009).

How to make gender count for and beyond 2010 lies in the need for a paradigm shift of major stakeholders to firstly report on the achievements of men and women equally, whilst profiling a wide spectrum of sport in which female role models and powerful athletic bodies might transcend gender stereotypes. Powerful messages of the empowerment of girls and women and their particular lived-realities as portrayed through "sport for good" initiatives such as those of GTZ/YDF in collaboration with partners, and linked to the FIFA World Cup events, should be captured for the messages of change in constituting a philosophy of gender equality and inclusion.



Coaches can teach boys about equality

Photo: William Bedzrah

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