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Introduction: Towards an Epistemology of African Football – The Symbolic Significance of the 2010 FIFA World Cup

Nharm Mhiripiri and Tendai Chari

Mega-football events are highly mediated, with a vast potential to attract the attention of millions of people across the globe. Live matches are broadcast on television and big screens in public viewing areas, and radio, newspapers and the internet do their fair share of mediation of the actual sport and the politics and fanfare surrounding the sport. This edited volume uses the FIFA 2010 World Cup in South Africa as a lens through which the multiple narratives about Africa, both those rooted in stereotypical assumptions and those with counter-hegemonic tendencies, are critically examined. In particular, it focuses on how media constructions of the 2010 FIFA World Cup contributed to and were informed by these narratives. The book examines football as a mediated discourse imbued with potent symbolic meanings that permeate ordinary life. The backdrop for such theorization is the FIFA 2010 World Cup, the first World Cup on African soil. Various chapters in the book reveal how the FIFA 2010 World Cup became a site upon which identities are imagined, constructed, reconstructed and deconstructed, thus demonstrating how football events can become positive forces for transforming societies.

Contributions in this volume draw from a range of interdisciplinary scholars based in the African continent, the African Diaspora, Europe and the USA. More broadly, the volume explores the way in which football in Africa is intimately bound up with deeper social, cultural and political currents. Chapters examine the 2010 FIFA World Cup as a potent social signifier from different theoretical and methodological approaches. The idea of the book sprang from the realization that sport, and African football in particular, existed on the margins of the academic enterprise and was narrowly being studied as a mere form of leisure, while its social elements remained on the back burner.

We are convinced that the contributions in this book will expand knowledge on the cultural and symbolic value of football in the African continent.
Introduction

beyond the realm of leisure. Our intention was to broaden and complement the growing body of scholarship on African football, particularly its interface with the communication media, and we felt that there was no better way to do so than by using the 2010 FIFA World Cup as the backdrop of this academic enquiry. Unlike earlier publications that focus on various aspects of African football (Darby, 2002; Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2004; Hawkey, 2009; Alegi, 2010; Alegi & Bolsmann, 2010; Korr & Close, 2010), our edited volume has been conceived around the backdrop of a mega-football event, with a particular focus on the symbolic significance of football in society.

The edited volume illuminates the multiple narratives around the 2010 FIFA World Cup and the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic logic of the event. The book straddles a range of disciplines such as cultural studies, media studies, the sociology of sport and the social sciences of sport. It will be the first to consider African football as a mediated discourse around which multiple narratives cohere. These narratives not only broaden understanding of the social significance of football and its enmeshment with African politics and culture, but also the socio-political character of Africa. It seeks to augment and complement scholarship on African sport, media and cultural studies, adding more voices, theoretical approaches and empirical enquiry. Our inspiration derives from the realization that the disciplines mentioned above have been slow to recognize African football as a legitimate field of academic enquiry. An epistemology of sport in Africa, especially one with more and more African scholars called to the party and sharing their views, has come a long way since the publication of Baker and Mangan’s groundbreaking collection, Sport in Africa: Essays in Social History, in 1987. The 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa gave new impetus to examining the multiple utility of football in Africa from an academic perspective, and this book is evidence of this impetus. Raymond Boyle (2012: 89) opines that ‘sports matters most because of what it tells us about aspects of society rather than specifically about the nature of sporting competition … It reveals aspects of individual and collective identity and its rich diversity of forms…’

Scholarly publications in the form of books and journals and postgraduate theses on the socio-economic, cultural and political significance of sport throughout the continent have been written. In addition, critical studies assessing the interface between sport and society in Africa, straddling the precolonial, colonial and post-colonial periods and applying a range of disciplinary perspectives, including political science, history, anthropology, human geography and sociology, have been produced. We also acknowledge the coterie of works on the study of sport in Africa, which include esteemed journals and dissertations (some of which have been inspired by the FIFA 2010 World Cup).

While previous scholarship on African football has been championed by scholars from the Northern hemisphere, the hosting of the FIFA 2010 World
Cup in South Africa has witnessed new interest on the subject by scholars from the African continent. Our volume attempts to combine voices from the North and from the South.

We are encouraged by the fact that the study of sport in Africa is gaining recognition as an important field of social-scientific and historical enquiry, not only because of a fast-evolving fandom on the continent but because of the critical position of sport as popular spectacle, albeit a part of the culture industries entangled in production, distribution and consumption of sport commodities. It is befitting that sport is finding its deserved space in critical African scholarship. The academic legitimization of African sport scholarship has seen the inclusion of panels on sport and leisure being organized at conferences such as the African Studies Association. In 2010 a number of journals such as *Ecquid Novi: Journalism Studies*, *African Identities* and *Third World Quarterly, Soccer & Society*, to name but a few, had special editions on the FIFA 2010 World Cup, and for the first time featured a significant number of articles by African-based scholars. Other serious journals such as *Africa Today, Journal of African History, Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies, Journal of African Media Studies* and *International Journal of African Historical Studies* have, in recent years, published papers dealing specifically with African sport. Notwithstanding these efforts, scholarship on African football remains peripheral compared with football epistemology in other regions, notably Europe, Asia and the Americas.

Our book is being published soon after Peter Alegi and Chris Bolsmann’s ground-breaking *Africa's World Cup: Critical Reflections on Play, Patriotism, Spectatorship, and Space* (2013). Although critical differences are anticipated to arise from the set of scholars and writers in the two edited volumes, our wish is that these books will complement each other and inspire a more humane, insightful and critical appreciation of and engagement with African sport and the African condition as a whole. Gone are the days when the study of African sport/football was a peripheral subject in academic scholarship, and the publication of *African Football, Identity Politics and Global Media Narratives* is a further reminder of this fact. At no time will there be adequate literature on any specific issue. Literature on African football, particularly its cultural dimensions, can never be enough in comparison to the popularity of the game on the continent and the pervasiveness of football imagery in all facets of social life in Africa. Historian Peter Alegi (2010) notes how football has become a rare form of ‘national culture’ in post-independent Africa, having gained its mantle as a tool for expressing dissent against the colonial system. Alegi and Bolsmann (2010) note that football is the most popular sport on the African continent, and many African countries have thriving domestic leagues.

The collection coheres around media narratives, identity politics and the 2010 World Cup, so it has a tight thematic focus. The methodological
approaches adopted in various chapters in the proposed collection are inno-

vative and have, no doubt, elicited highly original empirical data gleaned

from a variety of sources, such as blogs, travelogues, surveys and media

content analysis. Many of the chapters also adopt original theoretical per-

spectives in their analyses of football during the 2010 FIFA World Cup

tournament. Contributions in this volume utilize different theoretical and

methodological approaches to examine representations of football events

in the media, popular culture and everyday communication in the con-

text of the FIFA 2010 World Cup. The initial call for chapters was ambitious

and expansive, inviting abstracts in sub-thematic groups linked to the 2010

FIFA World Cup. These included mediation of African football events in

Africa; representations of the FIFA 2010 World Cup in the Western media;

the FIFA 2010 World Cup in the African media; the interface between

football and popular culture in Africa; football, music and dance; football

and commercial advertising; football, patriotism and myth-making in the

African context; football, politics and society in Africa; football, national-

ism and identity; football as a leisure activity; commercial imperatives of

football; football and gender in Africa; corporatization of football; football,

religion and religiosity; football as a developmental tool; football, fandom

and fanaticism; and representations of national soccer teams.

The ambition was not fully realized due to, among other factors, spatial

considerations; sheer author burn-out, resulting in some contributors falling

by the wayside along the long road of writing and rewriting; and editorial

interventions, not least the rigorous peer-review work that saw the rejection

of full papers whose abstracts were initially appealing and promising.

This volume is, therefore, an attempt to bring African football to the centre

of sport media and cultural studies scholarship through engaging with the

cultural and symbolic aspects of football and football events in Africa using

a multidisciplinary lens. It examines the multiple narratives on the first foot-

ball extravaganza on African soil: the FIFA 2010 World Cup, which was held

in South Africa.

Unlike other single-authored books which focus on a single aspect of

African football, this volume brings together papers on diverse aspects and

experiences of African football written from a multidisciplinary perspec-

tive. Authors hail from different academic backgrounds and deploy equally

diverse methodological and theoretical approaches to interrogate the way in

which the FIFA 2010 World Cup was experienced in different parts of the

world. Existing books on sport and Africa, which are either single-authored

or single-country case studies, have a bias towards a historical perspective

on the development of football in Africa. For instance, Peter Alegi’s African

Soccerscapes: How a Continent Changed the World’s Game (2010) chronicles

the trajectory of football in Africa from the 1860s to the time when South Africa

won the bid to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup, with South Africa being the

main focus of the book. Because the book covers a long period and primarily
focuses on one African country, it is difficult to delve more deeply into the social signification of football in an African context. Alegi and Bolsmann’s book *South Africa and the Game: Football, Apartheid and Beyond* (2010) has a bias towards one country, as it examines how South Africa transformed from international isolation in the world of sport to win the bid to host the FIFA 2010 World Cup in 2004, and how the hosting of the mega-event enhanced the country’s image. Another book by Ian Hawkey (2009), *The Feet of the Chameleon: The Story of African Football*, gives a historical account of the development of football in Africa, covering a number of countries with diverse cultures and histories. What is missing in many books on African football are diverse perspectives engaging with the multiple meanings of football in African society and how those meanings are mobilized in different spheres of life. Alegi and Bolsmann’s *Africa’s World Cup* is an exception, and our *African Football, Identity Politics and Global Media Narratives* is a worthy companion, presenting apt contrasts and verisimilitude.

Chapters in the book examine the instrumental logic of football in the sphere of nation-building, national identity and national development. Equally important, but omitted in most existing studies on African football, are football and its interface with communication, and the question of fandom and African fan cultures. These issues are also addressed in this volume, and of particular interest are chapters on gender and fandom by Rosemary Chikafa and Emma Durden, written against the backdrop of dominant patriarchal assumptions that soccer is a male sport.

The collection of essays in our edited volume straddles diverse disciplines, and authors hail from equally diverse geographical regions, but their contributions are unified and converge around common thematic, theoretical and methodological approaches. The list of authors speaks of a combination of emerging, mid-career and established academics and some early career researchers. The contributors are well positioned to engage with the subjects of sports, media and cultural studies, as they are well published in the area of communication, media and society. A few, such as Horky and Grimmer, have established backgrounds in the social-scientific study of sport per se, but those without such a background compensate for the lack with their informed understanding of media and cultural studies and the capacity of these fields to accommodate interdisciplinarity. What was refreshing in all the chapters was a preparedness to engage with other existing literature on African football and sport.

That the hosting of any future mega-sports events particularly in contexts where socio-economic disparities exist and huge expenditure of national resources on sports mega-events is difficult to justify, makes this volume both timely and relevant. The struggle over the meaning of mediate sports events was evident during demonstrations that plagued Brazil before and during the 2013 Confederations Cup and the preparatory stages for the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil. These developments echo events in South Africa in the run-up
to the FIFA 2010 World Cup. As the World Cup in Brazil beckons, similar issues, themes and legacies will manifest themselves, thereby reinforcing the currency of the issues explored in this volume. Inevitably, race remains a key to understanding Africa, admittedly with much more humane and sensitive encounters and representations of the continent. Whether Brazil will be viewed through the prism of race and class remains a question that is yet to be answered. Whereas Africa and South Africa in particular, had to struggle against Afro-pessimism, it remains to be seen whether any other host country or continent will be viewed through its human or racial archetypes, and to what extent the transcendental human identity will over-ride narrow conceptions of personhood, nationhood and cosmopolitanism. This book appeals to a range of disciplines. While its primary market is, admittedly, the social sciences of sport, it nonetheless remains relevant for sociology, politics, media and cultural studies. It would be a useful resource for final-year undergraduate and postgraduate students and researchers.

Summary of chapters

The volume comprises 14 chapters organized into four parts. Part I examines identity construction around narratives about the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Part II focuses on African fan cultures in the context of the 2010 FIFA World Cup, with particular attention to hegemonic constructions of gender. Part III examines African media narratives, focusing on media coverage of South Africa and Africa during the 2010 World Cup tournament. Part IV explores global media narratives of the 2010 World Cup, with special focus on the Western media representations of Africa during the World Cup. In Chapter 1, media scholars Nathalie Hyde-Clarke, Rune Ottosen and Toby Miller examine audience views on nation-building during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, questioning whether the ‘nation-building’ spirit engendered by the tournament was evident during and after the tournament. They observe that both the banality and the liberatory aspect of nationalism were on full display during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. On the one hand, there was a desire by football fans to use the vuvuzela as a red herring to distract opponents, a symbol of superiority and an expression of emotion, while, on the other hand, football was used as a tool to forge national unity in a manner that transcended South Africa’s apartheid legacy. Although nation-building and pan-Africanist sentiments were evident during the World Cup, they were too brief to be significant, underlining the inherent shortcomings in the instrumental logic of mega-football events. In the next chapter, semi-professional football player and ‘football tourist’ Luke Jones critically examines the potential influence of the various narratives about contemporary South Africa circulating during the 2010 FIFA World Cup on tourists from the global North. Using extracts from his diary, Jones considers how the various narratives about South Africa’s socio-cultural and political reality
shape the tourist’s knowledge and perceptions about South Africa upon his return to the global North, and how such knowledge and experience contributed to the formulation and solidification of certain truths about contemporary South African socio-cultural and political reality. Jones opines that how the tourist from the global North chose to re-story the various narratives about the host country could have far-reaching implications for the knowledge and perceptions of other Northerners about South Africa. The chapter demonstrates how visitors to South Africa during the World Cup were exposed to complex and conflicting accounts about the country’s social reality, and how their experiences contradicted the dominant narratives about the country’s racial harmony and stability. The experiences highlighted in Jones’s diary extracts resonate with Foucault’s (1977) view that there is no single regime of truth about South Africa’s social divisions, and the 2010 FIFA World Cup became an occasion for interrogating certain normalized narratives about the country’s racial stability which had been promoted by officialdom. Sociologist Kiran Odhav explores simulations of FIFA World Cup activities in Mahikeng, a town in the North West Province of South Africa. His analysis shows that, despite being excluded from the main activities of the World Cup, the activities involving the local community in Mahikeng constituted a hegemonic contest to the FIFA festivities around the country. He argues that the creation of a mini-World Cup for the youth in Mahikeng was an opportunity to host cultural events involving rural residents, thereby transforming the multicultural landscape of the World Cup. He argues that the projects in Mahikeng during the 2010 FIFA World Cup demonstrate some form of chipping away at the hegemonic domination over nations and their sports regimes and proof that the global is not immune to subversion. For Kiran, the activities that took place in these excluded locations are an indication that the World Cup needs to be democratized in order to be harnessed for multiple purposes of social change. In the next chapter, University of Texas-based health and kinesiology expert Wycliffe Njororai explores the demographic characteristics and affiliations of African players at the 2010 FIFA World Cup and their implications for the domestic league. He observes that the majority of African players at the World Cup ply their trade in Europe, a trend that is attributed to the unequal distribution of resources between the global North and the South, the lucrative financial compensation offered by European teams and the prestige of the European soccer brand. This analysis reveals that, while African teams with foreign-based players benefit through their domination of African continental competitions, such as the Africa Cup of Nations Cup, and opportunities to represent the continent at the World Cup final tournament, they are robbed of the top talent which would enhance their marketability. The real legacy of the 2010 FIFA World Cup is the realization that the domestic African game needs urgent revamping and professionalization if it is to compete on the global arena. The chapter illuminates
how the global sports labour migration system has been undermining the development of African football. Part II of the volume turns to African fans as a critical legacy of the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Theatre for Development specialist Emma Durden explores the phenomenon of new-found football fans during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Employing a qualitative ethnographic approach, she examines the sense of national identity of a group of party-goers turned football fans for the duration of the 2010 World Cup. Durden observes how the ubiquitous excitement and positive spirit engendered by the World Cup intensified positive feelings of ‘South African-ness’. Her analysis reveals that the World Cup in South Africa offered white South Africans an opportunity to break out of their self-imposed identity enclaves to interact with the rest of the population. However, the sense of fandom exhibited by this group was short-lived; the sense of camaraderie, community and solidarity characteristic of the World Cup faded, and the sense of pessimism returned as the curtain was brought down on the tournament. Although there was an overwhelming feeling of a single South African identity during the World Cup, this was transient; such a feeling was impossible to sustain in the post-World Cup phase. Findings in this chapter bring to the fore the malleability of national identity, in so far as it is continually moulded by the ever-changing matrix of historical, cultural and social factors. In the next chapter Rosemary Chikafa takes up similar issues, but goes further by bringing aspects of gender into World Cup spectatorship. Her analysis interrogates the potential and reality of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in transfiguring gender relations. Combining a focus group discussion with semi-structured interviews with Zimbabwean female football spectators, she asks whether the 2010 FIFA World Cup gave women more access to public spaces to articulate their fandom due to the absence of any significant discrimination against women. Her analysis reveals that full participation by Zimbabwean female audiences in these public spaces during the World Cup was hindered by their desire to maintain a harmonious co-existence with their male counterparts. The ‘African’ context of the World Cup obliged female spectators to conform to cultural conventions rooted in patriarchal hegemonies embedded in the Zimbabwean culture. Chikafa argues that the negotiation of gendered sports spaces by Zimbabwean spectators during the 2010 FIFA World Cup mirrors gender relations in Africa, whereby the womanist struggle is essentially in concert with, rather than against, men and women embracing their domestic roles as key figures in the family. Writing from the USA, State University of Arizona communication scholar Jeffrey Kassing explores the controversy around the vuvuzela, focusing on the competing narratives on its cultural significance during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The chapter reveals how, as a cultural symbol, the vuvuzela became a polarizing force during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, and discourses about what is a permissible and appropriate enactment of fandom illuminated the different meanings about how fandom should or should not be enacted.
The sound of the vuvuzela, and the manner in which it was played during the World Cup, further challenges certain notions and expectations about football fandom. The debate about the vuvuzela further demonstrates how sporting traditions continue to evolve and become revitalized over time. The competing versions of fandom – pitting an ethnorelative approach to football fandom that recognizes all football traditions against a universal one that accentuates an ethnocentric notion of football fandom – is testament to the fact that the vuvuzela is an artefact of South African football tradition as much as a counter-hegemonic tool. The debate on the vuvuzela reveals how fandom during the 2010 FIFA World Cup projected ethnocentric notions of football fandom which is intolerant of difference, and how the globalization of mega-football events such as FIFA World Cup fosters narrower versions of football fandom. In Part III the volume focuses on African media narratives, particularly on how African-based print and electronic media framed the host country and the African continent. Howard University (Washington DC)-based academic Chuka Onwumechili investigates the Nigerian media’s framing of sports stories before, during and after the 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament and the possible impact of such framing on Nigerian football fans. His study reveals that, prior to the World Cup, football reports in Nigerian newspapers echoed those of the Western media, characterized by negativity about South Africa’s capability to host the mega-sporting event. South Africa was projected as incapable, unorganized and the Other, and this anticipated failure was framed as expected and systematic. However, there was a shift from negative to positive media framing during the tournament, as the anticipated chaos did not take place, and the event resulted in South Africa being separated from the rest of the African continent. In the aftermath of the World Cup, Nigerian framing of news about South Africa was characterized by the perpetuation or rejection of Western media frames, depending on the type of story at hand. This ambivalence in media framing reflects the post-colonial context, in which the African media operate in liminal spaces and are amenable to, as well as resisting, colonial influences of Western media. The long-term implications of such influences are that the stereotypical framing of stories by the African media may engender Afro-pessimism (see also Tendai Chari, Chapter 9 and Nothias Toussaint, Chapter 14) in this volume. In the next chapter, Tendai Chari similarly focuses on framing of South Africa and Africa during the 2010 FIFA World Cup, with a view to ascertaining the extent to which such representation was pivoted on a counter-hegemonic lens. Employing textual analysis and informed by framing analysis, Chari analyses the discourses about South Africa and Africa in selected newspapers before, during and after the tournament. He observes that the framing of South Africa and Africa hinged on three main frames designed to re-image and re-imagine South Africa and Africa. However, these frames unwittingly elicited images that might undermine the image make-over enterprise, thus underscoring the
ambivalence inherent in the symbolic signification of mega-sports events such as the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Like Onwumechili, Chari’s analysis alludes to the subtle and not so subtle influences of the global media on African media through their agenda-setting processes. In the next chapter, Joyce Tsitsi Mhiripiri and Nhamo Anthony Mhiripiri examine the representation of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in media and scholarly articles. Drawing from purposively sampled archival press reports published between 2009 and 2013, their analysis hinges on an attempt to glean insights on whether the World Cup tournament presented any opportunities for the implosion, sustenance or perpetuation of Afro-pessimistic discourses that have held the continent back from being embraced in the global community of nations. Their analysis points to the fact that, although there were a considerable number of articles showing that the World Cup had engendered fervent moments of national identity cohesion, the moments of intense group, national and pan-African identification were fleeting and fraught with contradictions and suspicion, if not hostility. According to the authors, this shows that sport’s intended ideals are sometimes at odds with the reality on the ground; football may inadvertently reproduce narrow identities such as ethnicity, racism and regionalism rather than fostering higher transcendental social goals. This ambivalent function of football is a motif that connects most of the papers in this part of the edited volume.

Part IV of the volume focuses on global media narratives about the FIFA World Cup in South Africa, with particular focus on the hegemonic constructions of South Africa during the 2010 FIFA World Cup. Writing from Germany, sports journalism scholars Thomas Horky and Christoph Gimmer examine the reporting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup on German prime time television and social media, focusing on the image of the ‘Dark Continent’ projected in these media through a longitudinal and cross-sectional analysis of German public television reports and a qualitative content analysis of selected social media. Their study concludes that the image of the African continent in the German media was ambivalent. While discourses on the vuvuzela in the social media and tabloids tended to be a perpetuation of Eurocentric views, reporting on public television and the broadsheets was found to be more balanced and often provided sufficient background information on the topic at hand. In addition, the study observes the currency of inter-media agenda-setting between traditional media, notably newspapers and television, and social media platforms such as Facebook and blogs, where journalistic forms are increasingly shaping the image of South Africa. In the next chapter, media studies scholar Teke Ngomba explores the coverage of Africa during the 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament in nine mainstream newspapers with a view to understanding the correlation between the hosting of global mega-sports events and a country’s or region’s mediated image. Ngomba’s analysis reveals that coverage of Africa during the World Cup in these newspapers was more complex, with some clearly noticeable differences in the level of country-based thematic diversity. However,
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