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### Thoughts on the First African World Cup: Football, Representation and Exclusion

*Réflexions sur la première coupe du monde de football sur le continent africain : football, représentation et exclusion*

Chris Bolsmann

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## **THOUGHTS ON THE FIRST AFRICAN WORLD CUP: FOOTBALL, REPRESENTATION AND EXCLUSION**

Chris BOLSMANN\*

In the closing ceremony of the first African World Cup at Soccer City in Johannesburg, Colombian pop singer Shakira sang the official song of the tournament, the bland and commercial, yet highly catchy tune of « Waka-Waka (This time for Africa) ». Originally written by Cameroonian band Golden Sounds in the 1980s, Shakira added English and Spanish lyrics and exclaimed « This is Africa [and] We are all Africans [and] We are all Africa » (Howden, 2010). The irony was not lost when the only African contribution in performing the song was a South African band called Freshlyground adding backing harmonies. The first African football World Cup held in South Africa between 11 June and 11 July 2010 was one full of contradictions. On the one hand the South African organisers delivered a « world-class » spectacle for an audience of billions against the backdrop of abject poverty and extreme levels of inequality. On the other hand the World Cup projected a media-friendly, sanitised version of an Africa acceptable to a global audience. The event further highlighted notions of inclusion and exclusion within South Africa more

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broadly. This paper reflects on my experiences as a sociologist but also as a passionate South African football fan.

In this context, the awarding of the FIFA World Cup to South Africa on 15 May 2004, a decade after Nelson Mandela became the first democratically elected president is significant. In 2004, the *Sowetan*, a leading mass daily newspaper in South Africa, declared that winning the 2010 bid would mean « endorsing the South African miracle created in 1994 » and that « ours comes tantalisingly close to a true African bid... the benefits will not only spill over into the poorest parts of our country... our neighbours will also reap the benefits » (*Sowetan*, 2004a). In addition, it wrote that FIFA « has an opportunity to restore the faith of the world's poor in the principles of global governance and human solidarity ». In the aftermath of the decision, FIFA president Sepp Blatter said that « being a multi-cultural and multi-racial country, it is a dignified representative of Africa for the organisation of the World Cup » (*Sowetan*, 2004b). The *Sowetan's* (2004c) editorial wrote that the decision was a « vote of confidence in the ability of South Africans in particular, and Africans in general ». Within a short period of time South Africa went from a global pariah state excluded from events such as the World Cup to the darling of the international community in which she would host the first African World Cup.

Members of FIFA numbering more than the United Nations interested in hosting a World Cup tournament submit comprehensive bid books outlining a range of plans and hosting agreements in an attempt to secure the right to host the tournament. In addition, Governments of the respective member states provide guarantees to FIFA that include stadium construction and infrastructural development amongst others. The bid books are important in that they set the stage for the form and content of the potential tournament and provide important financial guarantees. When considering South Africa's 2006 (South Africa narrowly lost to Germany for the right to host this World Cup) and 2010 bid books submitted to FIFA, a Pan-Africanist rhetoric is clearly evident. The theme of « Africa's Call » runs throughout the 2006

submission. In Nelson Mandela's letter in the 2006 bid book, it states « Africa's time has come ». The 2010 bid book uses a fluttering South African flag to box the four parts of the bid. Each of the separate bid documents are graced with an attractive young black women dressed in a football related motif with a header strap that referred to « Africa's Stage ». Rather than employing the African motifs of wild animals and their attributes as was the case in the 2006, the 2010 bid book employed images of young attractive people from a cross section of ethnic groups. The official emblem and poster of the 2010 tournament are distinctly Pan-Africanist. The emblem depicts a figure resembling a rock art painting against a brightly coloured African continent and the poster a man's head at the top of the African continent heading a ball. Moreover, the catch phrase for the 2010 World Cup is « ke nako [it's time in Sesotho]. Celebrate Africa's humanity ». A range of themes are evident in the bid books of 2006 and 2010.

The organising committees for the 2006 and 2010 campaigns emphasized the following themes: a Pan-Africanist rhetoric and imagery; a discourse of development and modernity; the country as a young and stable democracy; possessing infrastructural and human capacities; low risk in terms of insurance due to having hosted previous tournaments and a financially secure option; and finally South Africa had « world-class » stadiums, with « excellent » transport, « advanced accommodation structure »; information technology and a « mature » media (Bolsmann and Brewster, 2009). Alegi (2001) notes that the objectives for the 2006 bid were to increase the international exposure of the country, have a positive impact on the domestic tourist industry and evoke national unity. The 2010 tournament represented a project at the national level and globally market « Brand South Africa ». Finally, Cornelissen and Swart (2006) note the predominant features in South Africa's bids for sports mega-events are broad developmental goals closely linked to an African revival. This was in the context of Thabo Mbeki's « African Renaissance » in which an image of a modern and confident Africa would be projected to the world (Cornelissen, 2007). At an intellectual level, the hosting of the first

African World Cup in South Africa provides a range of themes, issues and points of discussion to consider. At the emotional level of an ordinary fan, the first African World Cup can be understood from a different set of underpinnings.

As a football fan, the tournament represented the ultimate in any football fans' dreams and imaginations: watching your country play and host the World Cup. As a 10 year old, I listened to the 1982 World Cup on shortwave radio; four years later I watched very brief and delayed highlights from Mexico on South African television. In 1990 and 1994, I watched live television broadcast from Italy and the United States respectively. The South African national team qualified for the 1998 and 2002 events and I was able to watch via live television broadcasts, my country play in the finals. The team failed to qualify for the second round in both tournaments. We did not qualify for the 2006 tournament, so 2010 was a blessing in that we automatically qualified as hosts. The National Soccer League commissioned the building of Soccer City which was completed in 1989 on land obtained from the apartheid government and funds from the First National Bank (FNB) and South African Breweries amongst others. FNB was formed after sanctions busting British bank Barclays was compelled to sell its South African stake. Soccer City also known as the FNB Stadium became the largest football ground in South Africa. In February 1990, I was part of the 100 000 people who had gathered in the stadium to welcome Nelson Mandela, released from prison two days earlier, after 27 years of incarceration. Two years later, I witnessed the South African national team, recently readmitted into international football play its second international match and draw with Cameroon in the same venue. The highlight of my many visits to this stadium was the final of the African Cup of Nations in February 1996 when South Africa defeated Tunisia to become African champions for the first and only time. Soccer City underwent significant renovations in the build up to the 2010 World Cup. The stadium became the centre piece of the World Cup in hosting the opening and closing ceremonies. On entering the stadium on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2010 I was struck by the incredible

transformation of this historic venue. The original stadium unprotected from the Johannesburg sun was now converted into a calabash like cauldron. This remarkable transformation of this stadium in addition to a further four that were upgraded and five built from scratch cost the South African government an estimated €1.3 billion. I was able to watch games in six of the ten stadiums during the tournament and particularly in Soccer City one felt as if one could be in any of the world's mega-stadiums. Once inside the strictly controlled perimeters of the stadiums one was able to consume and buy official FIFA products and this included Adidas, Coca-Cola, Budweiser and hot-dogs amongst others. Traditional South African football matches are characterised by dozens of informal traders who sell food to the football going public at the entrances to stadiums. This was not the case during the 2010 event. A handful of such traders were permitted by FIFA to sell their traditional South African foods but at FIFA regulated prices, with FIFA accredited tags on display well away from the entrances to the stadiums. Prices outside and inside stadiums had been significantly increased making this football experience an expensive one.

FIFA set tickets prices for South Africans at a starting price of €15. Moreover, initial ticket sales were conducted online meaning applicants had to have access to fast internet connections and credit card facilities. Football fans from other African states had to compete with fans from the United States, Germany, France, and Japan amongst others to secure tickets to games. Tickets were eventually sold over the counter to prospective South African fans however the prices remained out of reach of the majority of the football going public in South Africa. Cash register operators, security guards and hospitality workers employed on temporary contracts for the duration of the event at stadiums were paid approximately €1.50 per hour. A 10 hour shift would barely cover the cost of admission into the stadiums. Sport like most aspects of life in South Africa has been racially segregated and kept apart prior to 1994 and this has meant football was seen as a predominantly black sport and rugby and cricket have been seen as white sports (see Booth, 1998). This is of course a crude

simplification as there is ample evidence that shows whites played and supported South African football teams in the same way black South Africans played and supported rugby and cricket teams and continue to do so. However, since the late 1970s professional football matches in South Africa have been primarily attended by black fans. The 2010 World Cup was different. Over 400 000 international visitors arrived in South Africa during the tournament including 130 000 from African states. In addition to foreign visitors in stadiums South African minority groupings such as white and Indians made up significant sections of the crowds watching the games. The traditional South African footballing public was priced out of the event and excluded (Calland, Naidoo, and Whaley, 2010). Despite the overwhelmingly positive press reports in the mainstream South African press during the tournament, some social commentators, analysts and journalists were able to pose more critical and pressing questions in relation to the hype and euphoria generated (see Alegi, 2007; Cornellisen, 2010; Desai and Vahed 2010 and Ngonyama, 2010). Craig Tanner's documentary *Fahrenheit 2010*, critiqued the use of state resources in preparation for the World Cup was not aired on public or commercial television in South Africa. The three broadcasters in South Africa refused to air the documentary. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) stated 'our job is obviously to promote the World Cup and fighting anything that can be perceived as negative is not in our interest' while e.tv suggested it was « not suitable for a South African audience » (Moyo, 2010: 56).

As far as the game was concerned, despite hopes that one of the six African participants (Algeria, Cameroon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria and South Africa) would do well in the first African World Cup, Ghana was the African only side that qualified for the second round. South Africa despite beating the 1998 World Cup winners France, in their final group game were eliminated, the first for a host of such a tournament. Ghana was cruelly knocked out of the tournament on penalties. This was after they missed a last minute penalty awarded for a deliberate hand ball by Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez. Suarez and Uruguay were portrayed in the

local media as having robbed Africa of its first World Cup semi-finalist. The support for Ghana in particular saw the local press refer to them as BaGhana BaGhana in reference the nickname for South Africa's football team Bafana Bafana. This new found loyalty and allegiance to the West African team is fascinating in as much as significant numbers of white South African donned Ghanaian football shirts and wrapped themselves in flags while a few went as far as painting their faces black! The Johannesburg daily newspaper *The Star* exclaimed that Ghana « should do it for Africa ». After their elimination, the Ghanaian team was bussed through South Africa's largest township, Soweto, with significant numbers of South Africans lining the streets to applaud their new heroes. This pan-Africanism was significant as only two year earlier, in May 2008, 62 African migrants and refugees were killed in xenophobic violence that spread across South Africa. These were not the first xenophobic attacks in post-apartheid South Africa however they were the most widespread and intense to date. Rumours of renewed violence against foreigners spread as the tournament drew to a close. South African president Jacob Zuma publically declared that there was no danger of xenophobic violence reigniting despite the fact that security personnel were deployed to potential hot spots. I wonder whether many football fans using trains from Johannesburg's Park Station on the day of the final noticed the significant numbers of Mozambican and Zimbabweans leaving the city and country as a precaution? The South African organisers ensured the police and security personnel were out in full force for the duration of the tournament. Designated Fan Fest and Fan Walks meant South Africans were able to use public spaces in ways unimaginable prior to the kick-off of the event. Middle class South Africans marvelled at the ability to walk through parts of South Africa's cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg in ways they had never done in the past. Many were able to use public transport for the first time in their lives. Spectators were bussed to and from stadiums and were able to catch trains previously considered dangerous and only used by South Africa's black working class.



The final brought the month long tournament to an end. The football had not been particularly good although such tournaments often are poor in football terms. Nelson Mandela was even wheeled out with his wife Graça Machel on a golf cart before the game. South Africa had successfully pulled off the World Cup spectacle without any serious incident as predicted it would be the case in the six years leading up to the event. Prior to the start of the tournament on 11 June 2010 *Time Magazine* exclaimed that football in South Africa has been a « ... political statement [and] a successful World Cup would be another one » (Perry, 2010: 88). While *The Economist* (2010) reported that South African president Jacob Zuma said 2010 was the most important year since the first democratic elections held in the country in 1994. *The Times* (London) noted before the opening match between South Africa and Mexico that « the country hopes that the World Cup will signal the arrival of modern South Africa – a brash, young, developing nation » (Clayton, 2010: 53) and that « so much is riding on this World Cup, if it goes well, chorus business leaders, the potential of a continent might start to be unlocked...The potential for further problems is massive » (Barclay, 2010: 4). While an editorial in the same newspaper stated that « the football World Cup is the new South Africa's coming of age... a successful World Cup will make it a beacon for the entire continent » (*The Times*, 2010a: 2). Despite reservations and concerns of a number of commentators within South African and abroad, the South African organisers were able to put a truly memorable and virtually incident free World Cup.

After the final on 11 July 2010, Makhundu Sefara (2010: 14) writing in the *Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg) went as far as to exclaim that the tournament had been « Africa's proudest moment ». After the culmination of the tournament, Kevin McCallun (2010: 1) writing in *The Star* exclaimed that the event represented a 'coming of age for South Africa, 16 years old and now the darling of the planet. It was Africa shouting out for a chance... it was a grand World Cup, a fantastic tournament – it was Africa's coming of age'. Danny Jordaan, chief organisers of the South African tournament suggested South Africa had « crossed a

huge psychological barrier » (Naidu and Philip, 2010: 1). South African president Jacob Zuma, who had attended a number of matches during the tournament including the opening and closing ceremonies, remarked that « we have been able to show the world that we have what it takes to compete with the best » (Johwa, 2010: 4). Finally, FIFA president Sepp Blatter claimed « Africa has proven that it can organize a World Cup [and] the perception that people outside of this continent had about Africa has changed » (Ntloko, 2010: 20). For FIFA, the first African World Cup represented a shrewd business decision as television and broadcasting rights alone had been sold for US\$3.2 billion, 30% up from the 2006 event (Naidoo, Makwabe and Ferreira, 2010: 1). In Britain, *The Times* (2010b: 2) noted in an editorial that « the World Cup has been a triumph for South Africa...has soared beyond its problems to deliver one of the slickest tournaments on record. More importantly, Africa's first World Cup has generated a wave of national confidence ». While the *Financial Times* (2010: 12) suggested « The World Cup has essentially given South Africa a chance to reintroduce itself to the rest of the world ».

South Africa was different during the event with overwhelming numbers of residents wearing the bright yellow of the host team. Cars were donned with South African flags of all sorts and indeed after their elimination flags of other countries appeared on cars. Schools were shut for a five weeks period and South Africans embraced the World Cup and each other in ways I never imagined possible. The 1994 election and subsequent inauguration of Nelson Mandela as president was a significant milestone in the history of the country. The sporting triumphs of the South African rugby and football teams in 1995 and 1996 respectively were significant too in terms of nation-building. The World Cup inserted South Africans into the global community albeit temporarily while the legacies of the event are less tangible. Depending on sources the costs of the tournament including infrastructural investment such as road, rail and airport improvements range between €4 and €6 billion, although many of these infrastructural developments are of little benefit to the poor

and marginalised of South Africa. This in a middle-income country in which unemployment is estimated by some to be as high as 40%. The feel-good factor, nation building and pan-Africanism generated during the event are short lived. Many of the stadiums will be underutilised in the future and local authorities will have to bear the costs of stadiums that will always make losses.

As a football fan the tournament was wonderful and I felt part of something very special and unique, however as a sociologist the contradictions remain as stark as ever, the first African World Cup was a sanitised and Disneyfied spectacle for global and local elites, it was an event of inclusion and exclusion. South African journalist Niren Tolsi (2010: 12) noted that a world class event was delivered but this was « focused in and around stadiums, for television audiences and the elite who have visited our shores, from fans to players ». More soberly, Richard Calland (2010: 24) provides an assessment of the tournament as a « First World show superimposed upon a putrid, demeaning Third World squalor ».

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### Summary

This paper provides a brief reflection of the first African World Cup held in South Africa in June and July 2010. The author spent several weeks in the country attending matches and reflecting on his first World Cup as a sociologist and a football fan. He argues that despite the successful hosting of the World Cup, the event was marked by inclusion and exclusion.

**Key-words: Football World Cup, South Africa, pan-Africanism, representation, exclusion.**

### Résumé

Réflexions sur la première coupe du monde de football sur le continent africain : football, représentation et exclusion

Cet article propose une brève réflexion sur la première coupe du monde de football organisée par l'Afrique du sud en juin et juillet 2010. L'auteur a passé plusieurs semaines dans le pays à assister aux matchs et revient sur l'évènement à la fois en sociologue et en fan de football. Il suggère que

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bien que l'accueil de la Coupe du Monde ait été un succès, l'évènement a été marqué par des processus d'inclusion mais et d'exclusion.

**Mots-clefs : Coupe du Monde de foot-ball, Afrique du Sud, pan-africanisme, representation, exclusion.**

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