

Local-global processes: linking globalization, democratization, and the development of women's football in South Africa

Fabrizio Pelak, Cynthia

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:

GIGA German Institute of Global and Area Studies

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Fabrizio Pelak, C. (2006). Local-global processes: linking globalization, democratization, and the development of women's football in South Africa. *Afrika Spectrum*, 41(3), 371-392. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-104456>

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-ND Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Keine Bearbeitung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.de>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-ND Licence (Attribution-Non Commercial-NoDerivatives). For more information see:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0>

Cynthia Fabrizio Pelak

Local-global processes:
linking globalization, democratization, and the
development of women's football in South Africa¹

Abstract

In our ever-increasing global world, it is becoming more difficult to understand local and national experiences of competitive athletes without reference to global processes. This is clearly the case when it comes to the global sport of football. This paper takes up the issue of local-global connections within football in Africa by examining the development of and the shifting power relations within South African women's football during the 1990s. The concurrent processes of democratization and globalization make South Africa a particularly intriguing context in which to examine local-global linkages. This analysis is based on multiple sources of data including qualitative interviews, self-administered surveys, archival documents, and direct observations of women's soccer in South Africa. Future directions for research to increase our understanding of contemporary African women's sporting experiences are discussed.

Keywords

South Africa, women's football, globalization, democratization, local-global connections

In our ever-increasing global world, it is becoming more difficult to understand local or national experiences without reference to global processes. This is surely the case if we aim to understand the experiences of competitive African athletes of the early twenty-first century. Scholarship that maps out local-global connections within the contemporary sporting realm is growing (e.g. Bairner 2001, Hargreaves 1999, Jarvie 2003, Maguire 1999, Rowe 2003). However, this literature tends to focus on sports and athletes positioned high up in the global-sport hierarchy. These sports are controlled by economic and political elites, promoted by oligarchic transnational corporations, and medi-

¹ I would like to acknowledge and thank all those in South Africa who made this research possible and the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript whose comments and suggestions greatly strengthened this analysis.

ated by powerful media-conglomerates (Law/Harvey/Kemp 2002, Whitson 1998). This focus has meant that theorizing about local-global linkages has centred on men and male dominated sporting networks (Stevenson 2002). Theorizing about global processes, local gender relations, and the experiences of 'everyday' women athletes has yet to develop. By gendering the global-sport literature and including women's experiences in the study of local-global sport processes, we enhance our theoretical understanding of the multiple and often contradictory dynamics of globalization. Moreover, by focusing on women athletes from non-hegemonic nation-states, such as those from African nations, we strengthen our capacity to theorize about the liberating and/or colonizing effects of contemporary global sports.

The global sport of men's soccer/football² has been central to scholarly debates on sport, globalization, commodification, and national identity. The gendered dynamics of soccer, however, tend to be examined only when women play the sport (Black/Hebdige 1999, Caudwell 1999, Cox/Thompson 2000, Scraton/Fasting/Pfister/Bunuel 1999). The uneven treatment of gender in the literature on soccer discursively reinforces 'men's soccer' as the standard and 'women's soccer' as the other. Moreover, such conceptualization contributes to the development of androcentric debates on soccer and globalization. Given that women's soccer is one of the fastest growing sports around the world (Hong/Mangan 2004), the sport warrants more scholarly attention.

In this paper, I theorize local-global connections by examining the development of women's soccer in South Africa during the 1990s. Specifically, I aim to theorize how the democratization of South Africa and the globalization of women's soccer are influencing local gender relations and women's experiences within sport. At the time when apartheid was being dismantled and a new political order emerging, women's soccer was becoming a global phenomenon. The concurrent processes of democratization and globalization make South Africa a particularly intriguing context in which to examine local-global linkages. Although I foreground gender in this analysis, the experiences of South African women footballers and the gendered structures of football cannot be understood without consideration of intersecting systems of inequality, namely race and class.

My analysis is based on data that were gathered as part of a research project examining sport and nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa.³ The data include semi-structured interviews and survey data with athletes participating in the Western Province women's soccer league, semi-structured

2 I use the terms soccer and football to refer to the same sport. In the South African context both terms are used interchangeably.

3 Additional findings and more detailed information about the data are published elsewhere (Pelak 2005a, 2005b).

interviews with eleven Western Province and national football administrators, archival materials, and direct observations of the Western Province women's league. The Western Province was chosen because it is widely considered the most developed location for women's soccer in South Africa. These data were gathered by the author during two three-month stays in 1999 and 2000 and a one-month stay in 2003.

The interviewees represent the gender, age, and race diversity of members of the women's football community.⁴ The archival documents include newspaper and magazine articles, official programs for annual interprovincial championships, annual reports and policy documents of the South African Football Association (SAFA), and the Pickard Commission of Enquiry Report. Attendances at weekly matches gave me the opportunity to observe the physical setting of the league and interactions between players, coaches, umpires, fans, and administrators. They also allowed me to build a rapport with community members, contact those whom I wanted to interview and engage in casual conversations with participants. In this analysis only select data are presented to elucidate how macro-structural processes of globalization and democratization have shaped the development of women's soccer.

Theoretical considerations

Globalization has become a buzzword in academic and popular discourses in recent years. Sports scholars have identified the growth of the global-sports-media complex, the transnational movement of athletes, the development of sports-commodity-consumption chains, and the sport-nationalism connection as critical issues in globalizing sport (Bairner 2001, Jarvie 2003, Law et al. 2002, Whitson 1998). Maguire (1999: 212) emphasizes the multidirectional and uneven nature of global flows and argues that the 'complexity of global sport lies not only in terms of how sports are used in different societies but also how these sports are read and interpreted.' Both cultural homogeneity and cultural heterogeneity are seen as part of the global-sport nexus. On one hand, the globalization of sport can impose particular sporting practices on local communities, constrain choices, and limit control. On the other hand, local communities can reinterpret global sports in ways that invent new traditions, create cultural heterogeneity, and empower participants. For example, Sugden and Tomlinson (1998) show how the soccer and the transnational organi-

4 61% of the interviewees were women and 39% were men. The average ages of the athletes and administrators were 27 and 44 years old, respectively. Nine of the interviewees self-identified as Black and/or Coloured (50%), six identified as Black and/or African (33.3%), two identified as White (11.1%), and one identified as Indian (5.5%).

zation Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) were used by Third World athletes and political leaders to resist colonial rule while at the same time the sport was used by political elites to reinforce colonialist and neo-colonialist forms of economic and cultural exploitation. Although there are exceptions, a common assumption in the global-sport literature is that globalizing processes negatively disrupt local practices and weaken local communities. The 'local' is thus positioned as favourable to the global.

Mapping out local reinterpretations of global sports, particularly those involving women athletes, has yet to be extensively done. Using the Olympic Games as a proxy to access the development of women's sports globally, we find that the opportunities for women's participation has doubled in the last twenty-five years (Coakley 2004). At the 1980 Olympic Games in Moscow, only 21% of the participants were women. That number steadily increased and at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, 40.7% of the participating athletes were women. Jennifer Hargreaves (1999) has documented the emergence of a women's international sport movement and argues that women are using social movement organizations as a strategy to expand sporting opportunities for girls and women across the globe. Hargreaves contends that the reach and scope of this international movement is limited because it is restricted to elite women. Nonetheless, this activism can be read as part of women's collective challenge to exclusionary cultural practices around the world.

Beyond the context of sport, gender scholars have argued that globalization processes largely exploit women and girls, especially those in Third World countries. Scholars have documented how transnational corporations are using women's subordinated status and the sexual division of labour to garner unprecedented profits while women's health and well-being are in jeopardy (LaFrance 1998). Third World feminist scholars, such as Chandra Mohanty (2003), criticize research that narrowly represents marginalized women in simplistic terms such as cultural dupes or victims rather than viewing such women as active agents negotiating local and globalizing forces. This is particularly important when exploring global dynamics within non-Western countries, where women's agency is often ignored or minimized by Western feminist scholars.

Because of its vast popularity and political significance to masculinity, nationalism, and capitalism, women's entrance into the world's most popular sport - soccer - has the potential for radically changing local gender relations around the world. In their comparative study of women's football in Europe, Scraton et al. (1999: 99) argue that 'women's access to football can be seen as a political outcome of a liberal feminist discourse that centres on equal opportunities, socialization practices and legal institutional reform.' The rise of a mass women's movement in South Africa during the early 1990s is a prime example of emerging gender politics on the African continent (Hassim 2005). Scholars are just beginning to explore how the recent democratization of

South Africa has opened up space for women to participate in sports (Hargreaves 1997). In this paper, I examine how South African women are reinterpreting football to empower themselves and their communities and explore the linkages between the concurrent processes of democratization of South Africa and the globalization of women's football.

A brief history of South African women's football

Although men have dominated as both participants and administrators of soccer in South Africa (Alegi 2004, Couzens 1983, Thabe 1983), women have a forty-year history of participating in organized soccer. Oral histories offered by members of the women's soccer community and archival news stories suggest that women started participating in soccer during the 1960s (Saavedra 2004: 243). By the 1970s, the South African Women's Football Association, the governing body for women's soccer at the time, sponsored annual inter-provincial tournaments. The lists of tournament venues, participating teams, and national champions of the annual event demonstrate that women's football was an urban phenomenon and most popular in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg. At each championship before the 1990s, players were selected for a national squad. However, due to the sports boycott during the apartheid era (Booth 1998), the national team did not play any international matches until the late 1980s. The first international competition played by a South African 'national squad' was during a five-week 'rebel' tour in Italy during 1989. To participate in the Italian tour, the South African squad had to covertly leave the country disguised as an anonymous football club. The first 'official' international match played by South Africa was in 1993 against Swaziland.

Women of European descent were the first to participate in organized soccer in South Africa. During the 1970s and 1980s, English-speaking, White middle-class women dominated the sport. A small number of Black⁵ women – first Coloured women then African women – started to join teams during the late 1970s. During this early period of women's soccer, the harsh material inequalities of apartheid and colonialism meant that very few Black women enjoyed opportunities to participate in sports. For the vast majority of African women, especially those in rural areas, participation in sport was irrelevant to their daily lives (Hargreaves 1997, Hargreaves/Jones 2001, Roberts 1992).

According to several interviewees, racial integration of women's soccer teams under apartheid rule was not a problem because the sport was so small

5 Drawing on a convention developed by the Black consciousness movement in South Africa, I use the term 'Black' in the text to refer collectively to South Africans of colour (i.e., African, Asian, and Coloured identities).

and hardly noticed by most people. Although women of diverse racial/ethnic identities came together on the soccer pitch, White privilege still shaped relations in the sport. On September 16, 1978 the *Cape Herald* published an editorial on women's soccer titled: 'White selfishness must cease'. The article read:

It is to the credit of Western Province women's soccer that its team for the recently completed interprovincial tournament was chosen 'on merit', that it was not an all-white team. It is a pity, though, that they allowed their good non-racial intentions to be outweighed by attending a racial celebration. Surely, good manners dictated that, if some of their party were disqualified from any activity surrounding the tournament, they should all disqualify themselves as well. ... One understands it is difficult for whites to appreciate the social humiliation (among other humiliations) that blacks have to suffer. But one believes that, at a time when South Africa is supposedly changing, whites should make an effort to learn.⁶

The writer recognizes the 'good non-racial intentions' within women's soccer, but observes that White women were still not willing to sacrifice their own comfort or privilege to challenge apartheid practices.

As apartheid was being dismantled in the early 1990s, Black women joined existing teams in larger numbers and started new teams. White women, on the other hand, left the sport, or 'disappeared' as one interviewee remarked. As more African and Coloured women joined soccer, more league games were played in 'Black townships', places where White women rarely travelled. Given the constraints of racialized spatial arrangements, many White women started to play indoor soccer, which is played primarily in White dominated areas where facilities are available. Although there are White and Black women involved within each context, indoor soccer became dominated by White women and outdoor soccer became dominated by Black women. The demographic shift over time is illustrated in the composition of teams participating in interprovincial tournaments. I examined team photographs and player names printed in tournament programs from 1987, 1988, and 1989 and estimated that Black women made up 15%, 18%, and 13% of the teams' membership in each respective year. In the years of 1990, 1992, and 1994, Black women made up 21%, 41%, and 39% of the teams' membership respectively. Demographic shifts continued through the late 1990s until there were very few White women participating.

Generally speaking, participants do not view the decrease in White women's participation as problematic. First because White women do not represent a large part of the population (12%) and second because White women's material advantages suggest that they could participate if they so

6 Editorial: White selfishness must cease. *Cape Herald*, 16 Sept. 1978, p. 10.

desire. Players and administrators also accept Black women's dominance in the sport based on perceptions of Blacks' 'natural' soccer abilities. The following comments by a national player illustrate the discursive construction of soccer as a game for African and Coloured women.

There are the odd few White players playing football, but many are going to other sports like basketball. And ah, I'm not trying to be funny, but lots of the White players don't have the natural talent the Black players have. I suppose they've [Whites] come to realize that, 'hey, I'm not going to make it in this sport any more.' And you get the Black players - they've got fantastic talent. ... Like our national coach always said, the Blacks [Africans] might have the natural talent, but the Coloureds play from their hearts. And that's what we need, to put the two together.⁷

This discursive re-construction of women's soccer as a 'Black game' is consistent with the dominant view of who owns soccer in the country (Alegi 2004) and demonstrates that the dismantling of apartheid has not meant the deconstruction of essentialist notions of race. Race is still a salient feature of the new South Africa and competitive sport is an important site for negotiating racial categories and meanings.

During the 1990s, the popularity of soccer among women has grown exponentially. For example, in the Western Province there were approximately six teams competing in 1990 and by the beginning of the 2000 season there were already 22 teams participating.⁸ A 1997 national survey of South African women estimated that 65,000 women participated in recreational and competitive soccer (SISA 1997: 19). Administrators of the South Africa Football Association, however, critique the methodology of the survey and claim that some 200,000 women participate.⁹ The national survey also estimated that 87% of the participants identified as Black/African, 5.9% as White, 4.8% as Coloured, and 2.5% as Indian/Asian. Comparing these estimates with national census data it appears that Blacks/African women are over-represented, Whites and Coloureds are under-represented, and Indians/Asians are proportionately represented.

The uneven participation among women in the post-apartheid context reinforces the feminist axiom that women do not form a homogenous group who share common experiences (Collins 2000, Mohanty 2003). In the context of sport, racially and economically privileged women have enjoyed many more opportunities than those racially and economically disadvantaged.

⁷ Interview, #3S, national player, Cape Town, 31 July 2000. Please note that since I promised confidentiality to the research participants their names are being withheld.

⁸ This finding is based on archival material gathered in the Western Province.

⁹ Interview, #4S, SAFA administrator, Johannesburg, 12 Sept. 2000.

Thus, to talk about the tremendous growth of 'women's football' glosses over the divergent experiences among South African women. However, since soccer is strictly organized along gender divisions, the distinction between 'women's football' and 'men's football' is meaningful. The sex segregation and the power differentials between women's and men's in soccer are critical for understanding the development of football in South Africa.

Democratization, gender equality, and sports

As apartheid was being dismantled during the early 1990s, a wave of gender activism emerged around the goal of getting gender equality recognized as an autonomous aspect of the new democracy (Lemon 2001, Hassim 2005, Mangaliso 1997, McFadden 1992, Meintjes 1998). In particular, the mobilization of the Women's National Coalition stimulated a national discourse on creating a non-sexist South Africa. The gender activism led to numerous mechanisms that encourage gender equality, including the participation of women at the negotiating table for a transitional government. It also brought about the adoption of a new constitution that guaranteed protection based on gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, and sexual orientation, the establishment of the constitutionally mandated Commission on Gender Equality, and increases in women's representation in national and local political bodies.

In this political context, a women's sports movement also emerged. In 1992, a Women's Desk was established at the National Sports Council, the leading sports organization associated with the new government. In 1994, the advocacy group 'The Women's Sports Foundation' was formed and two years later the umbrella organization 'Women and Sport South Africa' was launched (Hargreaves/Jones 2001, WASSA 1997). Although these efforts represent a progressive move toward valuing gender equality in sports, women's sport activists are limited to a small group of elite women. Many interviewees cited the high level of poverty, violence, and other serious problems facing South African women as the reason for the lack of urgency to deal with sexism in sports.

While the 'official' rhetoric of state-supported sport organizations includes the goal of gender equality, in practice it is not a priority of sport leaders (Department of Sport and Recreation 1998/1999, SAFA 1999/2000, Keim/Qhuma 1996). The two issues that monopolize national sport administrators' attention are the racial integration of big-time men's sports such as rugby and cricket and the hosting of mega global sports events. Large amounts of money, time, and energy were dedicated to the campaigns to win bids to host the Olympic Games and the men's FIFA World Cup. To understand these political priorities one needs to consider how historical power relations and structures within South African sports were shaped by race,

gender, and class (Alegi 2004, Booth 1998, Nauright 1997). Men's rugby and cricket have been central to the construction and maintenance of racist ideologies, White nationalism, and hegemonic White masculinity. It is thus not surprising that in the new South Africa, racially transforming these sports is symbolically important to nation-building. President Nelson Mandela's appearance at the 1995 World Rugby Cup in South Africa and support of the Springboks illustrate the centrality of men's sports to nation-building (Booth 1996). In addition, racially integrating White-dominated commercialized sports and attracting lucrative mega sports events are materially consequential to redistributing capital and economic opportunities to Black men who have moved into positions of power. Women's sports, on the other hand, have not been extensively commercialized and thus are not recognized as revenue producing. Moreover, women's sports are typically not seen as symbolically salient to cultural nationalism, although select individual women athletes in select competitions are promoted as national heroes. Scholars are just beginning to examine how discourses around women athletes contribute to cultural nationalism (Stevenson 2002).

Most male national sport administrators conceptualized sexism within sport as secondary and unconnected to racism in sport. The following quote from a top administrator of the South African Sports Commission¹⁰ illustrates how intersections of race and gender are routinely overlooked.

We are still dealing with the first stage of transformation. What are we doing with the Black population? Before you even get to the subsections of the broader problem. ... Our focus is at the first level. We are still focusing at the main problem, racial transformation. So gender becomes the next focus. If you have not solved the first focus, you are not going to start focusing more on the second focus.¹¹

The clear separation of race and gender transformation ignores the barriers facing Black women in sport and renders their experiences invisible. Such conceptualization constructs Black men's experiences as the standard and women's experiences, which are not understood as racialized, as secondary. The prioritizing of racial transformation over gender transformation means that the inequalities facing Black women, who are the majority of the South African population, are subordinated to the inequalities facing Black men. Despite the lack of appreciation for the intersections of racism and sexism, the

10 The South African Sports Commission was formed in 1999 out of the amalgamation of part of the Department of Sport and Recreation and the National Sports Council, which was subsequently disbanded.

11 Interview, #11G, South African Sports Commission administrator, Centerion (Pretoria), 7 Sept. 2000.

political context has shifted in such a way that concerns about gender inequalities in sports have become more legitimate and politically salient. National sport leaders can no longer completely ignore such issues.

The new political opportunity structures have meant that young South African women, especially Black women, are now imagining new possibilities and raising their expectations. In response to a closed-ended question, 96% of the female soccer athletes surveyed said that the government should do more to support women's sports. Both women and men view the new South Africa as more open. The following comment by a SAFA administrator illustrates this shift.

Before it was sort of a tough move for a woman to play football, but now it is not that difficult. We are living in a democratic country where you can do whatever you want.¹²

In this quote the emergence of democratic rule is directly linked to new expectations and opportunities for women in football. The end of the sports boycott also opened up opportunities for women to represent their nation. A veteran national player remarked about the realization of her dream of playing for the national team:

When I started playing, I always wanted to play for the national squad, but at that time because of apartheid, I never thought I'd get the chance, you know. And then, my chance finally came along.¹³

Although South African women are enjoying new opportunities in sports to represent their local communities and nation, they have not become ready symbols of their communities or nation like their male counterparts. Women athletes and women's sports are absent from the rhetoric of the new rainbow nation or discussions of using sport for economic development. South African sport is still profoundly a male preserve and gender is still used as a measure of citizenship when it comes to nation-building and sports.

Globalization and women's football

During the 1990s, football became one of the fastest growing sports for women around the world (Hong/Mangan 2004, Lopez 1997). New opportunities in professional soccer leagues emerged, and transnational governing bodies have, finally, encouraged the international development of women's

12 Interview, #6S, SAFA administrator, Johannesburg, 7 Sept. 2000.

13 Interview, #3S, national player, Cape Town, 31 July 2000.

football through regional and world championships. The first three official Women's World Cups sponsored by the FIFA occurred in the 1990s. In 1996, women's soccer became a full medal sport in the Olympic Games. During the 1990s, the Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF) started to sponsor the Women's African Cup of Nations (Egunjobi 2000), a qualifying tournament for the FIFA World Cups.¹⁴ And, in 2003 women's soccer was included for the first time at the All-Africa Games, a Pan-African multi-sports event held since 1965.

The growing popularity of women's soccer in Africa raises new questions about the Africanization of the sport (Alegi 2004) and shifting gender relations on the continent. One factor in the rise of African women's soccer is the expansion of the global-sport media nexus. In particular, satellite broadcasts of women's soccer have grown immensely. Keim and Qhuma (1996) identify the rise of television coverage as an important factor in the development of the sport. According to soccer administrators, with each televised event there is a dramatic increase in the number of girls and women expressing interest in the game. A top soccer administrator describes the phenomena:

Nigeria qualified to play in the first World Cup in 1991 and that was good for South Africa because we saw women playing football on the television, Black women. Suddenly there was a huge interest. Everyone wanted to play soccer. These girls got to travel; it was now just not running around in the streets. Black women could now see that maybe there is a future in this sport.¹⁵

As suggested, it was seeing Black/African women playing international soccer that inspired South African women to imagine new possibilities. After seeing Nigerian and Ghanaian women in World Cup events, Black South African women could more easily dream about travelling and making money by playing the sport. Television coverage provided evidence that soccer was no longer just for African boys and men or European women. Women's collective interest in the soccer skyrocketed as opportunities to play increased. The recruiting capacity of satellite broadcasts, however, is limited because most South Africans lack electricity and/or access to satellite/cable television.

With the development of skills, South African players are being recruited for professional leagues and university teams in Europe and the United States. For young poor South African women, the possibility of travelling abroad is very seductive and serves as a strong motivator. A senior national

14 Egunjobi, S.: Now women get chance of glory: Nations Cup opens window of opportunity for African stars. *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 12 Nov. 2000.

15 Interview, #5S, SAFA administrator, Johannesburg, 24 July 2000.

team player talks about what it would mean to travel overseas for many players:

Most players haven't been out of their own area, maybe for a two-hour drive down the road or something, and here they're getting a chance to go overseas. And overseas, you could be spotted by a scout; you could get a scholarship. That's what it's all about. We never had those opportunities when we [veterans] started playing, so at least there's something for the younger players now.¹⁶

With the opening of the economy in the 1990s, corporate capital flowed toward South African sport and some even trickled down to women's football. Women's football started to receive sponsorships from transnational corporations such as Reebok and Nike and nationally based corporations started to supply equipment, provide transportation, and support leagues. In 2001, the sponsorship of the South African banking and insurance company Sanlam enabled the development of the first national women's soccer league.¹⁷ Unfortunately, at times the national governing body – SAFA – served as a barrier to increased financial support for women's soccer. Interviewees involved at the national level report that the SAFA's management was slow to pursue leads on sponsorship opportunities for the women's game and that financial sponsorship for women's soccer was often constrained by existing financial contracts with major sponsors of the men's game.

The new efforts of the FIFA and the CAF to develop women's soccer were also limited. These transnational organizations did not welcome women into the sport with open arms. A cursory look at the FIFA's androcentric webpage and the CAF's poor organization of women's international matches illustrate the lukewarm reception of African women's soccer. Nonetheless, global capital and the global-sport media nexus seem to have helped develop new opportunities and interest in women's soccer. As the FIFA and the CAF started to sponsor regional and global competitions, young Black women collectively seized the opportunity of the moment to develop new sporting identities and practices.

Gender politics and the control of women's football

As one might expect, as more women showed up at their local soccer pitches, highly gendered spaces, more overt power struggles between women and men emerged. Some men even acted violently to defend their perceived right

¹⁶ Interview #3S, national player, Cape Town, 31 July 2000.

¹⁷ Ratone, T.: Women get big soccer boost. *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 16 Dec. 2001.

to control the sport. Up until 1994, women's soccer was organized autonomously and was separate from any men's governing body. In 1994, the unification of racially based organizations and the formation of the SAFA led to women's soccer being associated with, but still independent of, the male dominated association. In the context of the growing popularity of women's football and the influx of monies, an intense set of problems erupted between 1994 and 1996 in the Johannesburg area.¹⁸ Allegations of sexual harassment and mismanagement of funds were raised against several male owners/managers of women's teams.¹⁹ After the problems persisted for several years and written requests to intervene were unanswered by the SAFA, the Minister of Sport and the national government got involved. The Office of the President of South Africa convened a judicial commission, headed by Judge B. de V. Pickard, to investigate the gendered conflicts along with other problems within the SAFA.²⁰ The following statement from a national women's soccer administrator describes the conflict.

The sport grew very rapidly and in 1994 we started having a lot of problems with men. They saw women's sports growing and they wanted to come and start running it. We had huge troubles in those years - 1994, 95, and 96. It was really a tormented time for all of us. A lot of the women were threatened by these men and their kids intimidated. It led to the police being involved and all sorts of mess. And, unfortunately the men who were trying to take over the running of women's football had connections with the federation [SAFA] and the federation supported them instead of the women. The people in charge did not take us seriously. We had to go to the Minister of Sports. And there was a huge commission for men and women in soccer and it took about three years to complete. It resulted in women being rendered powerless. It resulted in the federation disbanding women's soccer as a separate entity and incorporating it into the men's structure.²¹

The Pickard Judicial Commission found that the male-dominated SAFA was extremely dilatory and negligent in paying attention to the problems (Pickard Commission Report 1997). Judge Pickard advised the SAFA to increase resources for women's football and create structures to develop the women's

18 Mazibuko, L.: Confusion as too many women take to the field. *Sunday Times* (Johannesburg), 4 Sept. 1994, p. 24.

19 Rulashe, L.: Sex claim: 'we are innocent': soccer officials out in the open. *City Press* (Johannesburg), 30 March 1997, p. 7.

20 Alfred, L.: Fran believes the sisters should be doing it for themselves. *The Sunday Independent* (Johannesburg), 5 Oct. 1997, p. 24.

21 Interview, #5S, SAFA administrator, Johannesburg, 24 July 2000.

game. As part of an effort to resolve the conflicts, women's soccer indabas²² were held in 1997 and 1999. At the 1999 meeting a decision was made to change the organizational relationship between women's soccer and the SAFA. Specifically, women's soccer became a subcommittee of the SAFA rather than simply affiliated with the organization. As a subcommittee, the larger male-led governing body would have total control over and fiscal responsibility for women's soccer.

This change was welcomed by most of those within the women's soccer community but some leaders voiced concerns. The vast majority of Western Province soccer players I surveyed (87.5%) thought that joining the SAFA would be beneficial because it would bring in more monetary resources for women's football from corporate sponsors. Some administrators, however, articulated concerns about women losing decision-making power. Like women's soccer in other countries around the world (Lopez 1997), men have been an integral part of South African women's soccer. Given women's limited access and experience within soccer, South African women soccer athletes are dependent on men's expertise and skills. Despite the concerns about losing administrative control, the trivialization of women's concerns, and the hostilities from some men, the women's soccer community generally does not seek to exclude men's participation. Rather, the primary contention is about the extent of men's involvement, the lack of women in leadership roles, and the marginalization of women leaders.

The aggression from men that women footballers faced suggests that the growth of women's soccer poses a significant challenge to the gender status quo and men's collective sense of entitlement to control the sport. The following quote from an assistant coach of the women's national team contextualizes the power struggle:

Traditionally in our culture the man is the head, is the money-maker, and the woman belongs to the kitchen. So, football is a male dominated sport and run by males. Even if it is lady's soccer, the males want to be in the forefront, in charge. It shouldn't be like that. We need to bring in more ladies to be involved. And then, we would be moving in the right direction.²³

Another man involved in women's soccer as a coach and referee in the Western Province echoed this sentiment when he remarked: 'Men need to get out of women's soccer. They want to control everything.'²⁴ Another common reaction to women's presence is to trivialize the women's efforts and simply

²² Indaba, a Zulu word, is lingua franca for a public gathering or meeting at which difficult issues are discussed from multiple perspectives.

²³ Interview, #1S, assistant coach of national team, Johannesburg, 5 Sept. 2000.

²⁴ Interview, #10S, Western Province coach, Cape Town, 30 July 2000.

withhold support. For example, when the SAFA asked the Western Province SAFA organization to host an international match in Cape Town, not everyone on the all-male executive committee was supportive. According to a top administrator, some men at the executive level needed to be convinced of the importance of the event and pressured to cooperate.

While most in the national SAFA leadership rhetorically support increasing women's leadership capacities, the process of dismantling male dominance within soccer has yet to be embraced and institutionalized (Pelak 2005a). The difficulty of translating gender equality into policy and practice is becoming clear to the women's soccer community as it is to those in other social and political sectors in South Africa (Friedman 1999, Hassim 2005). Nonetheless, the democratic transition has afforded South African women, especially Black women, new resources including an emergent national discourse on gender equity, governmental support, and transnational capital to develop more opportunities in soccer and challenge beliefs and practices that construct them as outsiders within the sport.

Discussion

As shown, the opportunities to play soccer have dramatically increased for South African women during the 1990s. More specifically, it is young, urban, Black women with some leisure time who are making soccer their game in post-apartheid South Africa. In this study I have considered both internal and external macro-structural processes and mapped out the local and global interconnections that have led to the development of women's soccer in South Africa. I have drawn on the work of Black feminists, such as Collins (2000) and Mohanty (2003), who argue that race, class, and geographic locations are critical in analyses of women's gendered experiences and that women's agency must not be ignored.

As apartheid was being dismantled during the early 1990s, women leaders organized a broad-based women's movement that resulted in national machinery to eradicate gender inequalities in the new South Africa (Lemon 2001, Hassim 2005). Women's sport advocates also seized the opportunity of the moment and established organizations and mechanisms to ensure that 'women and girls may develop and achieve their full potential and enjoy the benefits that sport and recreation have to offer' (WASSA 1999: 7). The democratization process created a new discourse around gender equality and Black South Africans responded by forging new sporting practices. Women's collective expectations of their government and access to previously off-limits activities such as male-dominated sports dramatically increased. In this sense, young female Black soccer players experienced the democratization of South Africa not only as racial liberation but also as gender liberation.

Women footballers' raised expectations and new sporting identities can also be linked to the global-media-nexus. The increased exposure to international women's soccer via satellite television had a positive impact on women's interests and contributed to their recruitment into the sport. The appearance of African women in World Cup tournaments, in particular, served to spark the imagination of many South African women who were already playing football in the streets of their neighbourhoods. During the 1990s, corporate capital was also directed toward women's football albeit miniscule amounts compared to what the men's game enjoyed. But nonetheless, these monies increased opportunities. This is not to suggest that transnational media conglomerates were acting out of a desire to empower women and challenge men's dominance. On the contrary, promoting women's soccer was a business strategy that transnational giants adopted in hope of maximizing profits.

Although many South African men embrace women's growing presence in football, the response of some men has been violent and aggressive. As more capital from transnational corporations flowed toward women's football some men saw an opportunity to individually benefit. Without the ability to prevent women from participating in historically masculine sports, control over the administration and coaching of women's sports became a mechanism which men as a group could employ to negotiate the challenges women pose (McKay 1997). Although there is an emerging gender equality discourse within South African sport, women are extremely underrepresented in decision-making positions at all levels (Hargreaves/Jones 2001: 1086). The conflicts over the administrative control of women's football in South Africa are not unique, but have long been a part of women's sporting histories elsewhere (Hargreaves 2000, Hong/Mangan 2004, Scraton et al. 1999). As Hargreaves (2000: 33) argues, South African women in soccer feel intensely that they lack power and they seek to share an equal footing with men in democratic processes.

Although more research is necessary, it appears that the development of an international women's sports movement (Hargreaves 1999) has pressured transnational sport organizations to be inclusive of women's football. The FIFA, the CAF, the Olympic Games, and the Pan-African sports event - the All-Africa Games - each sponsored new global and regional tournaments for women's soccer over the past decade. Although these transnational organizations are still fundamentally patriarchal, these efforts have been critical for the local developments of women's soccer. The efforts of transnational entities, particularly the FIFA, have compelled national and local football organizations to be more inclusive of women. In this way, global forces have had a liberating effect on gender relations at the local level. This finding challenges the underlying assumption of much of the male-based scholarship on globalization and sport that views disruptions of local sporting practices as disem-

powering and as a loss of control. Given that local sporting organizations are decidedly male-dominated and patriarchal, changes to local practices that incorporate women and girls are potentially empowering rather than disempowering. Inclusion of women and girls in and of itself, however, will not transform male dominance in sport as we have seen in countries around the world. Questions of the surveillance of South African women footballers' femininity and sexuality must be further investigated.

The movement of women into the male preserve of soccer also draws attention to the gendered nature of South African national identities (Nauright 1997). Much has been written about the importance of sport to nation-building processes. However, the sports that generally play this role are exclusive, male dominated sports. Women's soccer is one sport that could potentially challenge this pattern. In ways that can be compared to how South African men used soccer to assert independence and autonomy under colonial and apartheid rule (Alegi 2004, Booth 1998, Sugden/Tomlinson 1998), South African women are expressing their independence and autonomy by taking up soccer. They are struggling to represent their nation and to be recognized as national heroes in a game that has become 'African'. The rise of women's soccer in Africa as a whole (Saavedra 2004) raises questions about the continued Africanization of soccer and shifting local gender relations at the turn of the 21st century.

Although the gains have been modest, the issue of gender equality within sport in South Africa is firmly on the national sport agenda. Writing about the constitutional and institutional mechanisms involved in promoting gender equality in South Africa, Hassim (2005) argues that the efforts to include and empower women have fallen short of transforming gender inequality because they have not directly addressed men's power in a hierarchical society. The same can be said about changes in the social institution of sport. Gender sport activists have been successful at making sport more inclusive but have not fundamentally challenged male power. National sport administrators still conceptualize sexism in sport as unrelated and secondary to racism in sport. Nonetheless, South African women soccer athletes are challenging the cultural assumptions about gender appropriate behaviour. And, just as Nigerian and Ghanaian footballers encouraged them to create new sporting practices South African women footballers are encouraging all South Africans to imagine new possibilities. In this way, women footballers are not only challenging historical gender boundaries within soccer but also contributing to the broader socio-political transformation of South Africa.

Future directions

As these data suggest, the global and the local are intimately connected and neither can be fully appreciated without understanding the linkages between them. Globalization of women's football, on the one hand, is reducing cultural differences among nations and promoting homogeneous global cultural practices, but on the other hand, these globalizing processes are also increasing the varieties of sporting opportunities for women in their home countries. Football is not being imposed on South African women but rather South African women, like their counterparts around the globe, are taking up the sport and interpreting it in unique ways. In other words, globalization is a multidirectional process and local communities reinterpret global practices to meet their own needs and desires. Overall, these findings affirm Maguire's (1999) assertion that global sport can lead to both diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties.

This analysis has only begun to address questions of how processes of globalization and democratization are influencing women's sporting opportunities. There is a dearth of scholarship that investigates African women's sporting experiences and the shifting gender relations in the realm of African sports. Women around the African continent are taking up competitive sports and competing on the global stage. Questions about how African women are responding to global processes within sport and influencing local gender relations in the process have yet to be explored by scholars. By gendering the global-sport literature and centring women's experiences in our analyses, we can enhance our understanding of the multiple and often contradictory dynamics of the global-sport nexus.

References

- Alegi, P. 2004: *Laduma! Soccer, politics, and society in South Africa*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Bairner, A. 2001: *Sport, nationalism, and globalization: European and North American perspectives*. Albany/New York: State University of New York Press.
- Black, M. / Hebdige, D. 1999: Women's soccer and the Irish Diaspora. *Peace Review* 11 (4): 531-537.
- Booth, D. 1996: Mandela and Amabokoboko: the political and linguistic nationalism of South Africa? *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 34 (3): 459-477.
- Booth, D. 1998: *The race game: sports and politics in South Africa*. London: Frank Cass.

- Caudwell, J. 1999: Women's football in the United Kingdom: theorizing gender and unpacking the butch lesbian image. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 23: 390-402.
- Coakley, J. 2004: *Sport in society: issues and controversies*, 8th ed. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Collins, P. H. 2000: *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge.
- Couzens, T. 1983: An introduction to the history of football in South Africa. In: Bozzoli, B. (ed.), *Town and countryside in the Transvaal: capitalist penetration and popular response*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- Cox, B. / Thompson, S. 2000: Multiple bodies: sportswomen, soccer and sexuality. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 35: 5-20.
- Friedman, M. 1999: Effecting equality: translating commitment into policy and practice. *Agenda - Empowering women for gender equity*. Monograph in collaboration with the African Gender Institute. Durban, South Africa: 2-17.
- Hargreaves, J. 1997: Women's sport, development, and cultural diversity: the South African experience. *Women's Studies International Forum* 20: 191-209.
- Hargreaves, J. 1999: The 'Women's International Sports Movement': local-global strategies and empowerment. *Women's Studies International Forum* 22 (5): 461-471.
- Hargreaves, J. 2000: *Heroines of sport: the politics of difference and identity*. London: Routledge.
- Hargreaves, J. / Jones, D. 2001: South Africa. In: Christensen, K. / Guttman, A. / Pfister, G. (eds.), *International encyclopedia of women and sports*, vol. 3. New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 1084-1089.
- Hassim, S. 2005: Voices, hierarchies and spaces: reconfiguring the women's movement in democratic South Africa. *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies* 32 (2): 175-193.
- Hong, F. / Mangan, J. A. (eds.) 2004: *Soccer, women, sexual liberation: kicking off a new era*. London: Frank Cass.
- Jarvie, G. 2003: Internationalism and sport in the making of nations. *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 10 (4): 537-551.
- Keim, M. / Qhuma, W. 1996: Winnie's ladies soccer team: goals for the Guguletu home-side. *Agenda* 31: 81-85.
- Lafrance, M. R. 1998: Colonizing the feminine: Nike's intersections of postfeminism and hyperconsumption. In: Rail, G. (ed.), *Sport and postmodern times*. Albany: SUNY Press, 117-139.
- Law, A. / Harvey, J. / Kemp, S. 2002: The global sport mass media oligopoly. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 37 (3-4): 279-302.

- Lemon, J. 2001: Reflections on the woman's movement in South Africa: historical and theoretical perspectives. *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Comparative Studies* 6. Online: <http://www.safundi.com/issues/06/lemon.asp> (10 June 2006).
- Lopez, S. 1997: *Women on the ball: a guide to women's football*. London: Scarlet Press.
- Maguire, J. 1999: *Global sport: identities, societies, civilizations*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mangaliso, Z. A. 1997: Gender and nation-building in South Africa. In: West, L. (ed.), *Feminist nationalism*. New York: Routledge, 130-144.
- McFadden, P. 1992: Nationalism and gender issues in South Africa. *Journal of Gender Studies* 1 (4): 510-520.
- McKay, J. 1997: *Managing gender: affirmative action and organizational power in Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand sport*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Meintjes, S. 1998: Gender, nationalism and transformation: difference and commonality in South Africa's past and present. In: Wilford, R. / Miller, R. (eds.), *Women, ethnicity and nationalism: the politics of transition*. London: Routledge, 62-86.
- Mohanty, C. T. 2003: *Feminism without borders: decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Nauright, J. 1997: *Sport, cultures and identities in South Africa*. London: Leicester University Press.
- Pelak, C. 2005a: Negotiating gender/race/class constraints in the new South Africa: a case study of women's football. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 40 (1): 53-70.
- Pelak, C. 2005b: Athletes as agents of change: an examination of shifting race relations within women's netball in post-apartheid South Africa. *Sociology of Sport Journal* 21: 59-77.
- Pickard Commission Report 1997: *The Pickard Commission of Enquiry into the South African Football Association and the National Soccer League*. Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Roberts, C. 1992: *Against the grain: women and sport in South Africa*. Cape Town: Township Publishing Co-operative.
- Rowe, D. 2003: Sport and the repudiation of the global. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 38 (3): 281-294.
- Saavedra, M. 2004: Football feminine - development of the African game: Senegal, Nigeria and South Africa. In: Hong, F. / Mangan, J. A. (eds.), *Soccer, women, sexual liberation: kicking off a new era*. London: Frank Cass, 225-253.
- Scraton, S. / Fasting, K. / Pfister, G. / Bunuel, A. 1999: It's still a man's game? The experiences of top-level European women footballers. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 34: 99-111.

- SISA 1997: *Participation of women in sport in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Sport Information & Science Agency. Conducted by BMI, Sport Info (Pty) Ltd.
- Sugden, J. / Tomlinson, A. 1998: Power and resistance in the governance of world football: theorizing FIFA's transnational impact. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 22: 299-316.
- Stevenson, D. 2002: Women, sport, and globalization: competing discourses of sexuality and nation. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 26: 209-225.
- Thabe, G. (ed.) 1983: *It's a goal! 50 years of sweat, tears and drama in Black soccer*. Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers.
- WASSA 1997: *Women and sport South Africa*, unpublished document of WASSA. Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Whitson, D. 1998: Circuits of promotion: media, marketing and the globalization of sport. In: Wenner, L. (ed.), *Media sport*. New York: Routledge.

Zusammenfassung

In einer zunehmend globaler werdenden Welt wird es immer schwieriger, lokale und nationale Erfahrungen von Wettkampf-Athleten zu verstehen, ohne Bezug auf globale Prozesse zu nehmen. Das wird besonders deutlich, wenn es um den globalen Sport Fußball geht. Dieser Beitrag widmet sich den lokal-globalen Verbindungen von Fußball in Afrika, indem er die Entwicklung und die sich verschiebenden Machtverhältnisse im südafrikanischen Frauenfußball während der 1990er Jahre untersucht. Die hier gleichzeitig verlaufenden Demokratisierungs- und Globalisierungsprozesse machen Südafrika zu einem besonders interessanten Feld, um lokal-globale Verflechtungen zu untersuchen. Die vorliegende Studie basiert auf zahlreichen Quellen, darunter qualitative Interviews, selbst durchgeführte statistische Erhebungen, Archivmaterial und direkte Beobachtung von Frauenfußball in Südafrika. Abschließend werden künftige Forschungsrichtungen diskutiert, die zu einem besseren Verständnis aktueller Erfahrungen afrikanischer Frauen im Sport beitragen können.

Schlüsselwörter

Südafrika, Frauenfußball, Globalisierung, Demokratisierung, lokal-globale Beziehungen

Résumé

Dans un monde de plus en plus global, la compréhension des expériences locales et nationales des athlètes de compétition devient plus difficile si l'on ne prend pas en considération les processus globaux. Ceci est certainement le cas si nous parlons du sport global, le football. L'article traite du sujet des connections locales et globales dans le monde du football en enquêtant sur le développement et les relations de pouvoir dans le football féminin d'Afrique de Sud dans les années 1990.

Les processus actuels de démocratisation et de globalisation font de l'Afrique de Sud un contexte particulièrement intéressant pour l'étude des relations locales et globales. L'analyse est basée sur des sources multiples, comme des interviews qualitatives, des enquêtes de terrain, des documents d'archive, et des observations personnelles du football féminin en Afrique de Sud. Enfin, des pistes de recherches futures sont discutées, qui peuvent élargir notre compréhension des expériences contemporaines du sport féminin en Afrique.

Mots clés

Afrique de Sud, Football féminin, globalisation, démocratisation, relations locales et globales

Cynthia Fabrizio Pelak is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Memphis in the United States where she teaches courses on race/gender/class inequalities, feminist theories, and research methodologies. She has published in *Gender & Society*, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, and *Sociology of Sport Journal*.