The 2003 Cricket World Cup: Implications for identity formation and democracy in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Sports mega-events have the potential to provide a focal point for the strengthening of national unity and a coherent national identity. They are also said to be able to provide a catalyst or incentive for democratization and human rights processes if hosted by authoritarian or democratically weak regimes. However, the outcomes for host nations are not always pre-determinable. An analysis of South Africa and Zimbabwe's co-hosting of the 2003 Cricket World Cup illustrates this point. A racially charged discourse informed much of the exchanges about Zimbabwe's co-host status, both transnationally within the racial and ethnic contours of the cricket playing Commonwealth world and domestically within the host nations, thereby undermining the broader attempts at transforming the sport. Instead of the event having a generally liberalizing effect on Zimbabwean society it ultimately aided in further entrenching the regime.

Introduction

Mega-events are commonly defined as 'major fairs, expositions, cultural and sporting events of international status which are held either on a regular or a one off basis' (Hall,

HSRC RESEARCH OUTPUTS
4280

1989: 263). They are understood to be 'large-scale cultural ... events which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance' (Roche, 2000: 1). They are generally divided into first order events and second order events. First order events are the events such as the Olympics and Soccer World Cup, and second order events are smaller in scale such as the Cricket World Cup, Rugby World Cup, Commonwealth Games, All African Games and Pan-American Games, to name a few. Such events are commonly associated with a range of beneficial spin-offs for the host nations, an argument that bears particular salience for developing nations. Black and Van der Westhuizen (2004) have grouped these benefits, and how they pertain to developing nations, into three broad categories. First, the powerful, however transient, opportunities they provide for constructions of identity, usually associated with strengthening national unity and a coherent national identity; second; the potential for developmental initiatives and sports development per se; and third; the assertions that such events can provide a catalyst or incentive for democratization and human rights processes should they be hosted by authoritarian or democratically weak regimes.

This paper argues, along with a mounting body of scepticism, that sports mega-events do not always provide a focus for identity formation that is conducive towards the strengthening of national unity and coherent national identities, as is often touted by state elites. It is also argued that the hosting of sports mega-events by authoritarian or democratically weak regimes, does not always translate into a generally liberalizing effect, and can have various unforeseen consequences.

Accordingly, this paper will discuss the racial and ethnic divisions within the cricket playing Commonwealth as regards Zimbabwe's co-host status and the domestic

dimensions. This paper will further illustrate how the events of the Cricket World Cup did not impact positively upon democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe. The general significance of the World Cup in Zimbabwe and the manner in which the World Cup impacted on the opposition party in Zimbabwe, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), will also be explored. Ultimately, the focus will be on an analysis of the ways in which sports mega-events are generally said to promote democracy and human rights, namely, through boycott campaigns, pressures from the media, the stimulation of civil society and protests.

Sports mega-events: Identity, human rights and democracy

The literature dealing with sport, mega-events and identity commonly discusses sport and sporting events in terms of national identity (Jarvie, 1993; Allison, 1993; Sugden and Bairner, 1993; Booth, 1996; Hargreaves and Garcia Fernando, 1997; Black and Nauright, 1998; Grundlingh, 1998; Marks, 1999; Maguire, 1999; Hargreaves, 2000; Wamsley, 2002; Merrett, 2003; Black and Van der Westhuizen, 2004). The literature is varied and approaches the subject from many different angles. Furthermore, a separation between the specifically sports and specifically mega-events literature is not always appropriate or necessary for that matter as they intersect on a number of levels and are often inextricably intertwined. Within this literature there is an emergent argument suggesting that the hosting of sports mega-events should be tempered with a healthy dose of realism, even caution, particularly when hosted in post-colonial ethnically diverse emergent democratic societies characteristic of the developing world (see Booth, 1996; Black and Nauright, 1998; Grundlingh, 1998; Black and Van der Westhuizen, 2004).

For example, the 1995 Rugby World Cup hosted by South Africa just after its transition to democracy, arguably initially brought South Africans together in an unprecedented manner, whilst many remained sceptical of the long term reconciliatory effects of the event. Grundlingh (1998) discusses the events subsequent to the Rugby World Cup as detracting from the nation-building headway made during the event. Grundlingh (74), drawing from the writings of JM Coetzee (1995), proceeds to describe the images projected through the opening ceremony as historically incorrect, alluding to the somewhat contrived nature and perhaps slightly over zealous attempts at re-inventing the historical narrative of South African rugby. He further couples the euphoria produced by the event with a buoyant public mood that was merely conducive towards celebrations and that the World Cup just provided the necessary catalyst (75). Similarly, Booth (1996) is also sceptical about the success of the 1995 Rugby World Cup at uniting South Africans. Booth discusses South Africa's transformation through the symbols and discourse surrounding Rugby, most notably the Springbok emblem that has long been regarded a symbol of Afrikaner nationalism. Although the Springboks were 'Africanized' by calling them 'Amabokoboko,' Booth (477) believes that '[t]he springbok emblem will remain a symbol of racial division until there is ample evidence of black ownership, for example an equal mix of players. Only then will blacks recognize a legitimate historical discontinuity'.

Transnationally, mega-events have also been used to engage in public diplomacy and maintain cultural links. Sports mega-events such as the Commonwealth Games and Cricket World Cup have been used to foster good relations between the predominantly Anglo-Saxon members of the Commonwealth (Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand)

and the former colonies of the global South. However, within an era when state and interstate identities are becoming increasingly entrenched and divided, mega-events can invoke notions of power and inequality between the old and the new world metropoles, and can have various unforeseen consequences transnationally. Maguire (1999: 201) points out that the Euro 96 Soccer event, which is generally synonymous with the promotion of a regional identity, served to divide European nations in which soccer matches between 'old foes' such as England and Germany opened up broader debates on national identities within Europe and also resonated England's reluctance to join a 'United States of Europe'. As a further example of the type of argument put forward in this paper, it is worthwhile to note the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, where the event was seen as a polarizing force between regions within Spain, particularly in the case of Catalonia (see Hargreaves and Garcia Fernando, 1997; Hargreaves, 2000). Therefore, the first question this paper wishes to explore is: to what extent did South Africa and Zimbabwe's co-hosting of the Cricket World Cup result in strengthening national unity and coherent national identities both transnationally within the broader cricket playing Commonwealth world and domestically within the host nations?

Closely related to this, is an exploration of the impact of the Cricket World Cup on promoting a culture of human rights and democratic accountability practice in Zimbabwe. The link between sports mega-events, human rights and democracy is fairly tenuous; it is mostly discussed in the context of certain cases and generally follows the logic of constructive engagement. Furthermore, there appears to be a total lack of literature dealing with the effects that World Cups, or second order events, can have on human rights and democracy for host nations. This paper therefore attempts to address

this by drawing lessons from the likes of the Olympics and importing them to our case study of the Cricket World Cup. However, it is important to differentiate analytically between the levels of scrutiny associated with an Olympics and a second order event. The Olympics – because of its size, history and laws prohibiting discrimination inscribed in the Olympic Charter – renders it a more potent force.

The literature that there is suggests that mega-events can promote human rights and democracy in two ways. First, through the enhancement and building of 'social capital' and civil society ('social capital' being defined as the usefulness of connections and relationships) and second, through a complex set of incentives and pressures brought to bear by hosting such events (Black and Van der Westhuizen, 2004: 1209). The most pronounced example of the latter is the Olympics hosted by South Korea in 1988, whereby in order to avoid embarrassment, the government was said to concede to pressures exerted on it by student demonstrations, the media and threats of boycotts in the lead up to the event, and thereby a general liberalization of the political system was said to occur (see Mannheim, 1992; Larson and Park, 1993; Black and Bezanson, 2004). The debate surrounding the democratizing effects of mega-events was also very prominent in the recent 2008 Olympic Beijing bid and despite having no real historical or political basis of comparison – yet proving rather compelling nonetheless – bidders commonly drew on the South Korean analogy to lend further credence to the positive effects the games will have for China.

However, a survey of the emergent literature – albeit rather speculative and superficial literature at this stage – suggests that one should not expect too much from the event by way of democracy and human rights enhancement (see Tyson, 2001; Gilley,

2001; Black and Bezanson, 2004; Ting Li, 2005). Whilst the overall signals remain positive – and the games will provide powerful incentives and pressures in bringing China in line with human rights norms predominantly through pressure from transnational advocacy networks and corporate social responsibility groups – the event is not likely to enforce across-the-board regime change or act as a catalyst setting in motion a series of events which will lead to a variant of multi-party democracy vis-á-vis the South Korean case. Despite its problems the Communist Party remains well rooted and its opponents too weak. At the very least, it is expected that the event will ameliorate respect for human rights and open up new spaces for social mobilization (Black and Bezanson, 2004: 1258-1259).

Yet, the effects that an authoritarian regime or weak democracy's hosting of a mega-event will have on the broader political landscape is not always pre-determinable. Awarding mega-events to such countries does not always have a positive outcome and can have unforeseen consequences. In a worst case scenario the event could backfire or serve to further entrench the regime. Perhaps the most provocative example of this was Nazi Germany's hosting of the 1936 Olympics – an event that many have argued was a great diplomatic coup as it served to shore up credibility for the Nazi government and raise the profile of Hitler internationally (see Hart-Davis, 1986). The 1968 Mexican Olympics is another example whereby in the lead up to the event the government felt compelled to quench opposition with renewed vigour and was responsible for massacring protesting students.

Although such undesirable outcomes are unlikely in the Chinese case – as the Chinese authorities are believed to be reformers who actively sought out the games to

signal some kind of broader societal relaxation – there have been instances of unexpected demolition of homes and forced removals, with little or no legal recourse, in what is believed to be an accelerated urban modernization process (Ting Li, 2005). Although human rights questions remain the major foci of analyses around the event, it is worthwhile to note the excessive commercialism associated with the Olympics, and how this might come to be seen as a form of imperialism by the West.

Like the South Korean and Chinese examples, although on a smaller scale, human rights and opposition groups were hoping that Zimbabwe's co-hosting of the event would have a positive effect on democracy and human rights. This will be prefaced with a historical build up to the games as it has a bearing on how the events of the 2003 Cup unfolded.

History of the Cricket World Cup

The 2003 Cricket World Cup hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya was the first World Cup to be held on African soil. It has also been the largest sports mega-event held in Africa to date. It presented a historic opportunity to import the games to areas of a continent where cricket has never really been very popular and has often come to represent British imperialism. The ever expanding format of the World Cup is also reminiscent of the International Cricket Council's (ICC) attempts to move the game away from its traditional power bases and keep abreast with the steadily globalising face of modern cricket.

Ironically, the World Cup itself had historically been instrumental in fostering the white, colonial image of cricket. The initial idea of a Cricket World Cup arose from

initiatives by the South African mining magnate, Abe Bailey, who had played for Transvaal in the domestic Currie Cup league and strongly believed that cricket 'strengthened the bonds of the Empire' (Young, *Mail and Guardian* 13/03/2003). Thus, the initial purpose of the first World Cup in 1912 in England was to unite the 'white' colonies of Australia and South Africa with England (ibid). It is interesting to note that, by comparison, the first attempts at a Soccer World Cup were apparently only made in 1930 in Uruguay and featured 13 teams, suggestive of the more eclectic and cosmopolitan early beginnings of soccer (Morgan, 2003). The power of South Africa's gold was apparently instrumental in setting up the 1912 tournament. The founding of the Imperial Cricket Council by Bailey also tied South Africa firmly into the international cricketing fixture list (Merrett and Nauright, 1998: 64). It was only in 1961 that the 'Imperial' Cricket Council was to change its name to the 'International' Cricket Council to become more sensitive to the rising independent status of former colonies (Farred, 1999: 66).

The concept of a Cricket World Cup lay dormant from 1912 to 1975 due to various practical constraints. It was reawakened in 1975 by the increasing commercialization of international cricket and the rising prominence of colonies as both cricket-playing nations and as independent political entities within the Commonwealth. By 1975 the international cricketing scene had diversified sufficiently for a handful of colonies to provide sufficient competition for the trophy of cricketing world champions and was to be hosted in England again. South Africa did not take part in this tournament due to its exclusion from international sport because of apartheid. Zimbabwe was also

boycotted from international cricket due to the civil war and were only to re-enter in the early eighties following there attainment of independence at the start of the decade.

The games in 1992 were hosted by Australia and New Zealand; and in an ever-expanding format countries on the periphery of world cricket were to be included. From 1912 to 1992 the Cricket World Cup had gone from only three 'white' Anglo-Saxon countries of Australia, South Africa and England to a total of nine teams. South Africa re-entered the fray of international cricket just in time to take part in the 1992 World Cup.

The 1996 tournament was hosted in Asia after a strong bid was put in for a regionally hosted World Cup by Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka. This was the second time the Games were hosted in Asia, shortly after England decided to extend the franchise to former colonies, and bears stark testimony to the lucrative nature of cricket on the sub-continent. Finally, in 2003 the World Cup was to be hosted in Africa, almost a century after its initial conception by the South African, Abe Bailey. It is quite interesting to note that of all the established cricket playing nations, the World Cup up until 2003 was never hosted within the 'black' strongholds of the British Empire, ie, Africa or the West Indies.

Since the ICC and various cricketing protagonists situated outside the traditional powerbases sought to steadily globalise the Game throughout the latter half of the twentieth century (see Gupta, 2004), the format had to be extended with a total of 14 teams as the 'African World Cup' was to be the largest Cricket World Cup ever. There were a total of 54 matches over the span of 6 weeks on 15 different cricket grounds. Forty six matches were scheduled in South Africa, six in Zimbabwe and two in Kenya.

South Africa enters the bidding process

With South Africa having won the rights in the early nineties to host the 1995 Rugby World Cup, the purported benefits of hosting mega-events prompted South Africa to also bid for the Cricket World Cup. Instead of the long and acrimonious bidding processes that are normally synonymous with mega-events, a few conditions were to play into South Africa's hands and catapult it from sports isolation to host nation. The successful early stages of South Africa's political transition had stood it in good stead to be included in the 1992 Cricket World Cup and Mandela had expressed his satisfaction with South Africa's participation (Bacher, 2002: 45-47). South Africa was also emerging from a long and arduous transition. Hosting sports mega-events proved to be exceptional moments to celebrate its fragile, but new-found national identity.

In 1993 the ICC decided to convene a meeting to determine the future host nations. At the meeting South African cricket administrators lobbied hard for Africa to have its chance to host the World Cup (ibid). With South Africa having the strongest cricketing infrastructure in Africa, one of the benefits of the apartheid cricketing legacy, South Africa seemed the likely candidate to carry the mantle for an African hosted World Cup. In spite of its twenty years in the political wilderness, South Africa, because of its historical ties with the ICC, seemed an old favourite and relatively known quantity. From the viewpoint of the ICC, hosting the games in Africa appeared desirable as it was consistent with the changed image the ICC sought to project of itself. Although the decision to award the games to South Africa was officially made in 1993, it was only held exactly ten years later.

Taking the games to Africa

After the Games were awarded to South Africa, the concept of an 'African' hosted World Cup gathered momentum. In the late 1990s, it was decided to take the games to Zimbabwe and Kenya, and turn what could have been a purely South African hosted event into a truly 'African' one. From an infrastructural and geographical point of view, Zimbabwe, being the only other test-playing nation in Africa and neighbour of South Africa, seemed the most likely candidate to co-host the event. Kenya was also rising in status as a one-day international team and eager to put themselves on the world map.

The decision to take the games to Africa was consistent with a pattern of foreign policy initiatives by president Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki. The latter sought to rejuvenate the African continent socially and economically through what became known as 'the African Renaissance' (Bacher, *Sunday Times* 09/02/2003). The values and ideals inherent within the vision of an 'African Renaissance' were to become the cornerstone of the image South Africa was trying to promote through the World Cup. Closely associated with South Africa's decision to include other African states in the World Cup, and consistent with its hosting of various pan-Africanist events in the mid to late nineties, was the desire to signal and consolidate its newfound identity as an African state, having in its fairly recent history emerged from minority white rule.

Zimbabwe: Things start to fall apart...

The Cricket World Cup in Zimbabwe presented a chance to improve relations between Zimbabwe and the Commonwealth in general and the United Kingdom in particular. However, since the idea of an African Cricket Cup was first mooted in the late 1990s, the political situation in Zimbabwe deteriorated rapidly and greatly complicated the overall

aims of the project. The elections in March of 2002 were widely seen as fraudulent. This prompted Zimbabwe's suspension from the Commonwealth and marked a distinctive concern over Zimbabwe's suitability as co-hosts. Given the level of polarization in the country, the political crisis could easily have spilled over into the cricketing arena.

Moreover, the question whether Zimbabwe should co-host the event became very controversial. On the one hand, the event served as a great instrument of state legitimacy. As the *Sunday Times* (10/08/2003) noted about Zimbabwe's newly found fascination with sporting and cultural events: 'Soccer matches, music shows, beauty pageants and various other cultural events are being touted as 'government projects' in what appears to be a desperate bid to revive president Mugabe's flagging political profile'. On the other, the official opposition party, the MDC, and various human rights groups were opposed to the Games. However, should the games go ahead it could provide a window period or platform from which to voice their plight to the rest of the world, take advantage of the heightened media attention and highlight Mugabe's *lack* of legitimacy. It was Zimbabwe's former colonizer and Australia who lead the calls for both a boycott of Zimbabwe during the run-up to the World Cup and for further sanctions to be imposed on Harare.

The African World Cup

By the time the opening ceremony rolled into Cape Town in early 2003, the success of the World Cup hung in the balance. Until then it had become marred by controversy surrounding Zimbabwe's co-host status. In addition, South African cricket needed a psychological boost: besides the drama following the Hansie Cronje match fixing

scandal, South African cricket grappled with issues over racial representation in the sport. By all accounts, becoming the first winners on home soil would do the trick! Hence, in typically exuberant fashion, the opening ceremony sought to lift the spirits of those entangled in the web of controversy over Zimbabwe and the broader South African cricketing milieu, and prove undeniably that Africa could host an event of this magnitude. All the dress rehearsals and costumes were finalized. The stage was set for a demonstration of Africa's prowess on the international stage, rivalled by no other seen before.

Widely touted as one of the most extravagant opening ceremonies since the Sydney Olympics, on a technical level, South Africa rapidly dispelled any doubts as to its ability to pull it off. Consistent with its carefully crafted new African identity, a kaleidoscopic array of animals, musicians and dancers reflected Africa's rich cultural diversity. What made all of this all the more remarkable was the implicit attempt to undo a sport that had decidedly been associated with British imperialism. By celebrating an African identity through cricket and the World Cup, South Africa was implicitly trying to subvert the 'moral authority' of the colonizer. Essentially, by using the game that most epitomizes British identity to celebrate African identity, South Africa was implicitly trying to reconfigure not only the hegemonic order of international cricket, but also the broader historical inequalities between Africa and the Anglo-Saxon world. The bright lights, modernity and sophistication of the ceremony symbolized the African Renaissance, and served to reinforce this subversion.

South Africa, having managed to successfully negotiate the transition from apartheid to democracy, was also implicitly trying to project messages to the international

community of its potential as an arbitrator or mediator in conflicts. For example, as Mark Lottering, the famous South African comedian who hosted the opening ceremony aired on SABC television (08/02/2003) said when confronted by a larger than life 'big five' in his safari jeep: 'Don't worry everybody, I'm South African. I'm something of an expert when it comes to conflict resolution'.

However, looming under the bright lights of the spectacle, Zimbabwe's status as secondary hosts remained. Strategically, Mugabe was not invited to the opening ceremony. In defence, the ICC spokesperson Bongu Masisi noted that they had not gone out of their way to invite foreign dignitaries (Johns, *Daily News* 06/02/2003). Yet, within four days of the opening ceremony, England found it unacceptable to play cricket in Zimbabwe due to 'safety and security concerns', what many considered to be a smokescreen for political objections.

Meanwhile, the success with which the event was organised compensated for the South African cricket team's disappointing performances on the field. More than 85 000 spectators are thought to have attended the Games, watched by 1.2 billion television viewers (*Bua News* 24/03/2003). According to an economic impact assessment report commissioned by the South African Department of Sport and Recreation, the total economic activity generated by the event was estimated at R2.0 billion (Future Foresight Group, 2003: 10). However, amidst all the high fives and congratulatory speeches, what remained hidden was the degree to which the Games cast a new light on the broader problems of democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe. These questions provide the focus for the next sections.

Racial and ethnic divisions within the cricket playing Commonwealth

International cricketing disputes and calls for cricketing boycotts within the Commonwealth have often illuminated the role that race and ethnicity plays in forming group identity within Commonwealth politics. When Australia and England maintained South Africa's membership of the ICC in the 1960s – amidst calls for a cricket boycott by the West Indies and Asia – it was seen as an attempt by 'white' countries to protect the apartheid state. Similarly, the dispute over Zimbabwe's co-hosting of the Cricket World Cup split the Commonwealth cricket playing world roughly according to racial and ethnic lines. Those who favoured a boycott of Zimbabwe were the predominantly 'white' Anglo-Saxon cricket playing countries of England, Australia and New Zealand. On the other hand, the African countries as well as India and Pakistan had no problem with playing in Zimbabwe, and supported the Games going ahead. The standoff between the Afro-Asian and Anglo-Saxon nations over playing cricket in Zimbabwe resonated the loggerhead position within the Commonwealth in general. On the one hand, African states chose constructive engagement with Zimbabwe, most noticeably in South Africa's so-called policy of quiet diplomacy, increasingly folded under the banner of the African Renaissance. On the other hand, England, Australia and New Zealand, all prominent cricket-playing nations, wanted harsher action taken against Zimbabwe by the Commonwealth, as manifested in their willingness to apply sporting sanctions during the World Cup.

The fact that it was a 'Cricket' World Cup, laden with the inevitable symbolism of British imperialism, meant that Zimbabwe could not resist the opportunity to frame debates about its suitability as hosts through colonial discourse and the politicisation of

race. For example, Zimbabwe's chief government spokesperson, Jonathan Moyo, stated that Australia's John Howard and Britain's Tony Blair wanted to 'keep cricket white.' 'If the British want to keep cricket as a white and colonial sport, then they should do so alone because we are not interested in their rubbish' (*Reuters* 30/12/2002). Therefore, the manner in which Zimbabwe responded to the calls for a boycott by England and Australia reinforced the white, colonial image of cricket that had pervaded the game for so long.

Ironically, whilst the ICC sought an African Cricket Cup to transform the image of the sport from its white, colonial ancestry, the divisions that erupted over Zimbabwe within the Commonwealth, risked the opposite: highlighting exacerbated divisions between the Afro-Asian and Anglo-Saxon regions of the Commonwealth. As principal host, these tensions created formidable diplomatic challenges for South Africa.

Domestic dimensions of Zimbabwe's co-host status

Not unlike the transnational division that Zimbabwe's co-hosting status had created within the Commonwealth, so South African domestic politics reflected similar, racially informed, divisions. Although disputes between the majority African National Congress (ANC) and the official opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), are too often conveniently framed as black-white disputes, what is interesting is the manner in which politicians implicitly play into these classifications to align and mobilize political support, thereby arguably perpetuating this type of framing within popular discourse. The ANC insisted emphatically that the Games scheduled for Zimbabwe should go ahead. While remaining consistent with the overriding African Renaissance motif,

President Thabo Mbeki framed all the talk of a boycott against Zimbabwe 'as a plot against an African hosted World Cup' (*BBC News* 07/02/2003).

By contrast, echoing the sentiments of their Anglo-Saxon counterparts in the Commonwealth, the DA firmly believed Zimbabwe's hosting of the Cricket World Cup should not go ahead as it would shore up Mugabe's legitimacy in the same way the 1936 Olympics did it for Hitler (*SABC News* 05/01/2003). The sub-text within this response from the DA is that ethnic minorities – whites in particular – found themselves increasingly excluded in the formation of an African identity – the virtue and value of 'covering' for Zimbabwe appeared increasingly doubtful and invariably left many more prone to identifying with the governments of the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

Although one should not read too much into an ANC-DA disagreement, how the South African government responded to the debate about Zimbabwe's co-host status as much as to the Zimbabwean crisis in general, was critical, since the issue of identity had become particularly salient. For a country which, under the aegis of Thabo Mbeki, emphasised the ideal of an African Renaissance, affirming South Africa's unwavering African commitment emerged as of paramount concern. Hence the debate rapidly acquired racial dimensions. Were the ANC as government to be less equivocal in its support, its credentials as an African leader would surely be found lacking by others on the continent.

The significance of the World Cup in Zimbabwe

Given the polarized situation in Zimbabwe, it was inevitable that the Games would become highly politicised as both the incumbent regime as well as opposition groups

attempted to appropriate the event for their own political agenda and thereby hoped to erode the legitimacy of the other. The Zimbabwean government had quite clearly realized the potential of the Games to shore-up international – and quite possibly by extension – domestic legitimacy for the Zimbabwean African Nationalist Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). In order to project a more sanitized view of life in Zimbabwe, various measures were being put in place by the Zimbabwean government. The police and army were deployed to ensure no dissenters would try and hi-jack Mugabe's show. There was a broad clampdown on opposition groups, as now more than ever the country had to be on its best behaviour. The army was sent in to disperse queues at the petrol stations en route to the cricket grounds so that people arriving would not see the extent of Zimbabwe's fuel crises. The cricket grounds had become like police stations after threats by opposition groups to dig up pitches and plant maize on the cricket fields for the starving millions (*The Daily News* 10/02/2003).

Yet, opposition groups in Zimbabwe also realized the World Cup's potential to draw international attention, protest the deteriorating human rights situation and ultimately *corrode* Mugabe's legitimacy. By early 2003 relations between ZANU-PF and the MDC hit an all time low. The leader of the opposition, Morgan Tsvangirai was on trial for treason. Mass stay-aways and food riots were organized in the cities in which the matches were to take place. At a time when established channels of communication appeared redundant and the prospects for civil disobedience increased, the World Cup appeared as a new medium for transnational advocacy networks to push for greater press freedom within Zimbabwe. Given the international media publicity which the event generated, it meant that the time was ripe for opposition groups to harness the games for

political statements which would be louder and clearer than dozens of 'illegal' mass rallies in Zimbabwe could ever broadcast.

Indeed, what had become quite clear during the months leading up to the World Cup and throughout the tournament itself is that it was no longer just about a game. Cricket had become the vehicle for protest. In a country where civil society struggled for room to manoeuvre, the World Cup had opened up a space, if only fleetingly, for so many voices silenced by the Zimbabwean regime to protest on the back of the Cricket World Cup. In fact, a game that is not even particularly popular in Zimbabwe, had suddenly been elevated to an issue of national importance. Much of the exchanges between political parties and pressure groups alike now centred on this one, key event.

These debates, however compelling, in the end did not impact positively upon democracy and human rights in Zimbabwe. Instead of enhancing conditions for greater societal openness and democratisation, Harare successfully manipulated the Games as a showcase to strengthen its legitimacy and quench domestic political dissent. In the rest of this article, we highlight four conditions that – at first glance one would expect to have had quite the opposite effect – in other words, strategically seize the World Cup to leverage greater political freedom. Yet, these openings did not occur. These four conditions are (i) weakened effect on the position of the MDC; (ii) an ineffectual boycott campaign; (iii) an ambivalent media impact and (iv) protests, specifically the Olonga-Flower affair which came to be framed in racial/colonial terms by the Zimbabwean government. We do not claim that these conditions had no effect at all, simply that, in combination with the complexities of identity discourses which also informed South

Africa's approach to the Zimbabwean issue, the prospects for democratisation through the Cricket World Cup were dim.

Impact upon the MDC's position

The ability of the MDC, as the official opposition party in Zimbabwe, to place pressure on ZANU-PF and effect a peaceful negotiated outcome is vital for the wellbeing of democracy in the country. Yet, the World Cup in Zimbabwe weakened rather than strengthened the MDC's position. Firstly, although the Zimbabwean public were by and large fairly divided as to whether they thought the games should go ahead or not, the Cricket World Cup in part served as a pacifier to placate the rising civil unrest by providing the citizens with 'entertainment' and a chance to celebrate a sense of Zimbabwean identity, however feeble, fleeting and ambiguous it may have been. In that sense, the event served to divert attention from the country's immediate political problems, namely food shortages and human rights abuses.

Secondly, at a critical time when the leader of the MDC, Morgan Tsvangirai was in prison, the MDC experienced internal disputes as to whether or not Zimbabwe should co-host the event – an issue which even threatened to dislocate the upper echelons of the party. Tsvangirai believed that Mugabe would use the World Cup for political propaganda, yet the mayors of the cities of Harare and Bulawayo, both senior MDC members, wanted their cities to host the games *in lieu* of the perceived economic benefits it would bring. Paradoxically, these MDC urban strongholds were also the only cities chosen to host matches and the mayors' premature endorsement of the Games did not bode well for internal party discipline. Although Harare's mayor, Elias Mudzuri, was

quick to change his stance after being arrested, this sort of indecision and conflicting viewpoints within the MDC appeared to resonate the oft criticism of the MDC as an incoherent and ineffectual opposition party.

Thirdly, Mugabe had vowed to crackdown on those suspected of planning to disrupt cricket matches and the MDC bore the brunt of the heightened repression. MDC representative Paul Temba Nyathi noted: 'There had been a sudden increase of violence and arrests of MDC MP's and officials and leaders of civic organizations since the beginning of the month [January 2003] as preparations for the Cricket World Cup reached advanced stages' (*Mail and Guardian* 24/01/2003). In the weeks before the World Cup at least 10 MDC members, including two members of parliament and one lawyer, reported receiving electric shocks administered by the Zimbabwean police (Meldrum, *Guardian* SA 08/02/2003). These torture tactics bore testimony to the manner in which the Zimbabwean authorities were allegedly trying to get information about possible plans of civil disobedience during the World Cup period.

Lastly, the ANC's insistence that the Games go ahead in Zimbabwe also served to compound the ailing relationship between the MDC and the ANC, for the latter was therefore seen to sanction Mugabe's actions, despite the MDC's long-standing call on the ANC to take a harder stance against Mugabe.

The boycott campaign

Mega-events are said to be able to apply pressure on the host nation to reform politically by amongst others, boycott campaigns. The boycott waged by the United Kingdom in particular, was not very effective. Firstly, the threat of a cricketing boycott actually

played into the hands of Harare's propaganda machine: the unwillingness of the British and Australian governments to play cricket in Zimbabwe – whilst no such threats were made by countries like India, Pakistan or South Africa – prompted Zimbabwe to frame the debate in colonialist terms rather than deteriorating economic and political conditions. This type of framing also formed part of the broader colouring of the so-called 'land invasions'.

Secondly, compared to the sporting boycott against apartheid South Africa, it is important to note the different values attached to cricket, and with it, which racial groups identified with cricket in the two countries. For example, one of the major successes of the sporting boycott against apartheid South Africa lay in its ability to deprive particularly white Afrikaans males of the sports that they so dearly loved. Cricket in South Africa, like rugby, was traditionally perceived as a 'white' game and much national pride was pinned on South Africa's dominance in such games. In Zimbabwe by contrast, cricket is still predominantly seen as the sport for white elites, reflected, for example, in the racial composition of the Zimbabwean national cricket team at the time of the World Cup. 'Punishing' ZANU-PF members and supporters in particular by depriving them of access and participation in the world of cricket hardly compares to the kind of symbolic isolation imposed upon rugby-loving white National Party supporters.

In the third instance, some hypocrisy surrounded the British-led boycott as British companies continued doing business in Zimbabwe. In fact, trade between the two countries was estimated at about 195 million pounds in 2002 (Ghosh et al, 2003: 39). Again, unlike the South African case, the boycott campaign against Zimbabwe in sport had no corollary in economic terms.

The media

The media's role during a mega-event is crucial as the exceptional kind of global publicity generated increases the stakes – both for the incumbent regime seeking to benefit from the opportunity to showcase the country – as well as the opposition which seeks to undermine such credence. Given one estimate – that nearly 86% of the World Cup's pre-event international media's coverage focussed on the politically contentious decision to host the Cup in Zimbabwe and Kenya (Future Foresight Group, 2003: 5) – the event had served to shore up a substantial amount of negative publicity about Zimbabwe. Hence the government sought to limit the freedom of the international media, enabling the state-run media to monopolise a great deal of World Cup coverage. The state-run media took full advantage of the opportunity to frame any political protest as anti-Cricket Cup agitators and thus in cahoots with the British and Australian governments.

Yet, when the World Cup rolled into town, even Zimbabwe's stringent media laws had to be relaxed, if only slightly. This opened up space for human rights groups to use the perceived protection of the press during the World Cup to their advantage and actively spurred on players and spectators to use the event for political purposes. For example, an independent Sunday newspaper in Zimbabwe carried an advertisement, 'It's a dark day for cricket,' which urged Zimbabweans to boycott the games in protest, or to dress in black and white and wear a black armband if they attended it (Xabanisa, *Sunday Times* 16/02/2003). However, compared to the restrained role of the international media and the dominance of the state-run media, independent media outlets had a minor impact.

Protests

Protests can easily embarrass the government hosting a mega-event. A government will usually seek to improve its human rights record through specific initiatives in order to undo such protests or undermine their salience. In Zimbabwe however, protests at the cricketing grounds simply formed part of the government's overall attempt to suppress any opposition. In spite of numerous assurances that the Zimbabwean authorities would allow peaceful protests to go ahead during the event, Harare was not willing to tolerate any form of political protest. Not that the protesters were not without their victories. It was two Zimbabwean players, Henry Olonga and Andy Flower, who set a precedent and inspired even the most 'apathetic of countrymen' as one Zimbabwean put it. Another summed it up more bluntly, stating that the men's action 'had given him the balls to want to do something' (ibid).

Fast bowler Henry Olonga – considered to be a Zimbabwean 'black icon' – and white batsman Andy Flower – considered to be one of the world's best batsman – walked onto the field of Zimbabwe's opening match of the tournament, each wearing a black armband. In a statement made about the deteriorating human rights situation in the country the players stated that they were 'mourning the death of democracy in our beloved country' (Vice, 10/02/2003). It was a particularly brave protest because Mugabe was the sole patron of the Zimbabwean Cricket Union (ZCU). The act was widely discussed as a possible act of treason, potentially punishable by death. The political climate had become such that their actions could not only affect them, but also their loved ones. Despite the tremendous pressure brought to bear on both players to abandon their protest, they persisted throughout Zimbabwe's games in the World Cup. During the

match against the Netherlands for example, Dean (*Times* UK 01/03/2003) reported as follows:

> A crowd of 3000 sang protest chants against the Zimbabwe regime holding anti-government banners. Flower had helped his side to 301 with a fine 72 ball 71... When Olonga whose father lives in Bulawayo, came onto the field, there was a huge roar from the crowd. A Zimbabwean team source said he thought the publicity given in the international press, and in particular *The Times*, to Olonga's treatment had helped to force the ZCU to allow him to field...There's no doubt in my mind that this sort of pressure will have an effect on how the ZCU handle the whole Olonga and Flower affair.

Despite the same protest action and the same means, the two players experienced different consequences – again re-enforcing the racially charged discourse that framed the event. The state-run *Daily Mirror* accused Flower of 'selling out' Zimbabwe by striking a deal with his British county side, Essex (Xabanisa, *Sunday Times* 16/02/2003). Under pressure from the government, but also reaching the twilight of his career, Flower willingly retired from Zimbabwean cricket after the World Cup and seemed to slip away to England relatively unhindered. The protest appeared to be the swan song to a great international career – part of a deliberate plan to make a pointed political statement before he exited the country and the game at international level. The World Cup in Zimbabwe presented the right opportunity.

Whilst such a protest by Flower was seen to be not that unusual, the fact that a black player such as Henry Olonga, protested in the same manner – heightened the sense

of betrayal felt by the Zimbabwean government. The fact that Olonga was seen as being a 'black icon' and although relatively young – was the longest serving black player in the national team – seems to be the reason for the two players getting different treatment for their protest. According to Xabanisa (ibid), the players' protest was considered a 'white thing to do' and that 'black administrators are angry with Olonga – reportedly accusing him of being a coconut,' – black on the outside, white on the inside. Olonga was subsequently dropped from his club and the national side. Shortly after Zimbabwe's match against Pakistan in Zimbabwe, the effects the protest had on the 26-year-old fast bowler were very clear, well-captured in a newspaper report (Manthrope, *Sunday Telegraph* 16/03/2003):

> Henry Olonga's international career came to an end ... with a secret journey to a safe house somewhere in South Africa. He was to hide until he is able to start a new life in a different country ... [allegedly] Seven plain clothed officers from Zimbabwe's secret police ... arrived in East London ... Their real purpose for being in ... town was more sinister than watching their country's emotionally ravaged cricket team bow out of the World Cup. Olonga had received numerous death threats during last month but this one was different. He was told the officers intended to 'escort him home,' where a likely charge of treason awaited.

However, when Olonga escaped from the Zimbabwean secret police and went into hiding in South Africa, essentially as a 'political exile,' he made it quite clear that he did not feel

safe in South Africa: 'You have to remember that the ANC and Zanu-PF are bedfellows. I'll feel completely safe only once I get to England' (*Cape Times* 18/03/2003). The ANC was quick to react to Olonga's comments stating that he 'knows nothing about the constitutional and political environment in South Africa or about the nature of international inter-party relation' (ibid) – highlighting the diplomatic challenges caused for South Africa by choosing and insisting on Zimbabwe's co-hosting.

Whilst the Olonga/Flower affair had initially caused waves beyond a mere game, and served to highlight the deteriorating human rights situation in the country, it did not trigger, wide scale protests or other means for mass mobilisation for example. With hindsight, the players' protest, brave as it was, only had an ephemeral impact and had no lasting effect on the broader prospects for democracy in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

With the official mascot of the Cricket World Cup being the symbolically black and white striped Zebra, the 'rainbow' of races was slightly more complicated than the pelt of one of Africa's much flaunted indigenous animals might suggest. Whilst the appeal of hosting a sports mega-event – particularly by governments in deeply divided societies – to celebrate national identity and thus, however fleetingly, gloss over racial and ethnic divides, the Cricket World Cup arguably heightened these divides. These divides were both nationally within the host nations and internationally, notably between the white Anglo-Saxon cricketing world and those in the global South.

And whilst it is often held that sports mega-events can provide a vehicle for liberalization in authoritarian or democratically weak regimes, Zimbabwe's co-hosting of

the Cricket World Cup had possibly served to further entrench the regime. The Zimbabwean government felt the need to tighten its grip ahead of the World Cup, and neither protests by players, the media, nor a cricketing boycott or various initiatives by the MDC to use the Cup as a means of undermining the legitimacy of the ZANU-PF regime in order to trigger new liberalization 'moments' proved to materialise.

How could these largely unintended consequences be avoided in future similar cases? Firstly, in terms of identity, the historical links of the sport in question is important to take into account when awarding mega-events to countries. The traditional white, colonial image of cricket provided the Zimbabwean government with a workable metaphor for cultural colonialism and played into the hands of its anti-Western rhetoric.

Various factors also impact on an authoritarian or democratically weak regimes' response to hosting mega-events. The motive for acting as host and the significance attached to the event is important. For example, as already alluded to, the Chinese authorities sought to host the Olympics in 2008 in order to signal some kind of broader societal relaxation. Similarly, although it was initially not punted by the South Korean state elites as such, the momentum and importance which South Korea's hosting of the Olympics in 1988 accumulated, was said to have caused the government to acquiesce to the democratizing pressures exerted on it (see Black and Bezanson, 2004).

However, to once again highlight, the major difference between this case study and the 1988 South Korean Olympics and the up-and-coming 2008 Chinese Olympics is the sheer size and history of the Olympics, coupled with its various laws and regulations enshrined in the Olympic Charter, compared to the smaller scale of a second order event. The Olympics has greater potential to act as a pressure point for political and economic

reform. Yet, the themes remain the same, particularly with the pervasiveness of modern day media. The Cricket World Cup, whilst indeed providing potential as a pressure point for change, in the end was utilized as a pressure point to maintain the status quo, as the liberalization forces galvanized within Zimbabwean society through its hosting were of a fairly small and manageable nature. However, the event was an important tool in bringing pressure to bear on Zimbabwe, arguably disproportionate to the type of pressure normally exerted through second order events, particularly due to the conflation between the cricketing world and Commonwealth politics. This however was also part of the problem as the racial/colonial charged discourse illustrated.

Perhaps, future cases will demonstrate a clearer understanding by international sporting organizations of the benefits and pitfalls of hosting first and second order events in authoritarian or democratically weak regimes. The crude assumption would be that such a regime could successfully utilize a second order event to enhance, or maintain its legitimacy, but a first order event might elicit forces too powerful to control making the regime more likely to 'lose control' of the event, as the South Korean example highlights. However, if the regime welcomes these changes, it could prove all the more cathartic. These assertions and more will be put to the test during the up-and-coming 2008 Olympics in China. When all is said and done, the number of 'no balls' and illegal 'bouncers' delivered by the Zimbabwean regime during the course of the Cricket World Cup of 2003, simply was not cricket.

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