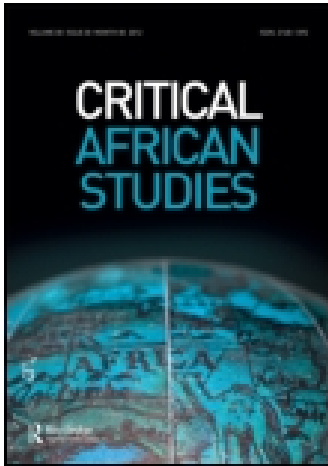


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Publisher: Routledge

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## Critical African Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcaf20>

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Published online: 08 Aug 2014.



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To cite this article: Manase Chiweshe (2014) One of the boys: female fans' responses to the masculine and phallogentric nature of football stadiums in Zimbabwe, *Critical African Studies*, 6:2-3, 211-222, DOI: [10.1080/21681392.2014.940077](https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2014.940077)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2014.940077>

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## One of the boys: female fans' responses to the masculine and phallogentric nature of football stadiums in Zimbabwe

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*(Received 18 March 2014; accepted 25 June 2014)*

Studies of football fandom from across the world all highlight masculine and misogynistic tendencies amongst the fans, players and administrators who populate football stadiums. Domination of men's football spaces by men makes stadiums hostile environments for women who are often physically and verbally abused. This paper outlines the experiences of female fans who attend matches in Zimbabwe. It provides a nuanced analysis of female fans' responses to the masculine and phallogentric nature of the football stadium. In Zimbabwe female fans are increasing in number, challenging the dominant belief that stadiums are no-go areas for women. Using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 40 female fans, the paper highlights how women react, negotiate and respond to misogynistic and vulgar songs and chants. This research in Zimbabwe brings to the fore the voices of female fans and how they construct the stadium experience. The paper draws from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to highlight how female fans cope with masculine nature of stadiums. Women use various strategies such as joining in the singing, remaining oblivious, sitting in quieter parts of the stadium and responding to abusers.

**Keywords:** female fans; Zimbabwean football; masculinity; stadium culture; femininities

### Introduction

The presence of women in largely male-dominated spaces such as football stadiums offers interesting questions about the paradoxical nature of female fandom. This paper focuses on part of the female fan experience in football stadium using women who attend matches in Harare, Zimbabwe. Scholars (Agnew 2006; Gosling 2007; Jones 2008) from across the world have shown how football stadiums are punctuated by abusive, misogynistic and phallogentric images. As such they are highly female unfriendly, yet the number of female fans is increasing across the world. The question is then, how do women respond to the abusive and denigrating atmosphere regularly experienced at football stadiums and what strategies are used to counter this? What mechanisms do they use to survive the misogynistic attacks from male fans? Using a sample of 40 purposively sampled fans, this paper offers an exploratory endeavour into understanding how female fans respond to masculine cultures that dominate football stadiums. The research begins from the standpoint that female fans are not a homogeneous or special group. They are differentiated in the same manner as male fans and are attracted to football for varied reasons. This study thus avoids essentialising the female fan or depicting them as anything other than

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ordinary fans. In this paper, I highlight how they negotiate stadium spaces which are intrinsically sexist. There are many female fandoms which explain why women respond to sexism within the stadium in different ways. The importance of this paper is that it highlights the need for a serious analysis of stadiums in Zimbabwe to ensure that teams attract more fans and provide an environment that makes football accessible to everyone.

### **Background to the study**

The male dominance and misogyny that characterise football stadiums unconsciously re-establishes soccer as pathology of patriarchy meaning a misogynistic, male-oriented tradition that excludes women (Heide 1978). This exclusion of women is also apparent in the thinness of research on women as serious fans in their own right. There is limited research on female fans especially where public spaces are still largely dominated by men. Women, however, also love football and are as fanatical as their male counterparts. Studies on female fans in Germany, Italy and the UK show that despite their minority status women are just as enthusiastic and devoted as male fans (Dunn 2014; Pope and Kirk 2014; Toffoletti and Mewett 2012).

Football fandom has proven itself to be a fertile ground for the display of masculine identities, and a ready-made arena for the playing out of these identities. Sexual symbols and phallic images permeate football fan culture. Football songs and chants in Zimbabwe are punctuated with many misogynistic messages which celebrate male sexual domination. The songs degrade women and perceive sport as a sexual encounter in which the losing team is portrayed as a woman. The stadium is thus a theatre for asserting hyper-masculine identities. Watching games – especially in the stadium, as opposed to at home – is a predominantly male pursuit. Armstrong (1998), in his study of football hooliganism, found that only 10% of fans at Sheffield United FC games were female, and there is no reason to believe that this percentage would differ substantially elsewhere (certainly, the anecdotal, visual evidence of televised soccer matches indicates as much). In part, moreover, the fact that fans will be in close and sometimes uncomfortable physical proximity – also marks stadiums as traditionally gender inappropriate for women. In Zimbabwe, stadiums are predominantly male arenas where virtues of masculinity are celebrated and reinforced. The language and symbols of these spaces are phallic and highly misogynistic.

Soccer fandom is traditionally a patriarchal institution which effectively serves the reproduction of hegemonic masculinity and allows little room for women, because femininity is constructed as an object of sexual conquest and physical inferiority (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). From the description of scoring as a sexual act and the losing team being likened to women (a vagina more precisely), sexist symbols are part and parcel of fandom (Chiweshe 2011). Football stadiums provide an arena in which masculinity is constructed around a clear and distinct set of defining norms. The stadium was in the past not considered a place for ‘upright females’. This paper shows that this view persists today among soccer fans in Zimbabwe, highlighting how football fandom recreates and reinforces the perceived inferiority of women. The heavily masculine nature of football teams fosters a culture of misogynistic behaviour that makes young players see themselves as powerful and privileged, and anyone else – including women – as lesser objects (Gosling 2007).

Exaltation of manhood is part of football in Zimbabwe. The songs and chants tell a story of masculine domination of an opponent which is feminised. Feminization of opposing teams is a vital part of watching and supporting football. The dominant gender regime in football thus remains highly masculine. Fandom promotes an orthodox form of masculinity that promotes negative (sexist, misogynistic and anti-female) attitudes towards women.

## Football in Zimbabwe

The specific focus of this paper is female fans' experiences in football stadiums. It is however important to place this discussion within the historical context of football fandom in Zimbabwe. Football in Zimbabwe from its first existence encompassed racial, gender and class hierarchies. The sport is a product of a colonial system based on racial apartheid. Football was used by the colonial government to control the black urban populations, yet locals soon found it to be a viable means of resisting white colonial rule (Giulianotti 2004). Darby (2000) argues that the development of football was promoted by the white colonial government who believed that vigorous physical activity provided a civilized outlet for hostile aggression and so the state invested and promoted sport as a means of social control. Stuart's 1989 thesis entitled *Good boys, footballers and strikers: African social change in Bulawayo 1933–1953* shows how sport provided a vehicle for self-assertion of Africans during the colonial period. In post-colonial Zimbabwe, football continued to occupy a central social and political space. Chiweshe (2011) shows how football is part of everyday life for fans in Zimbabwe, whilst Zenenga (2012) highlights the political nature of football in Zimbabwe. Post-colonial debates in Zimbabwean football are largely built around the ethno-regional rivalry between Dynamos and Highlanders football clubs.

Stuart (1996) shows that the Dynamos – Highlanders rivalry is based on ethnic differences which have spilled over into politics and are being expressed in football. According to Chiweshe (2013, 244) however:

The rivalry takes an ethnic, cultural, and political dimension. There is such a complex interplay of factors in choosing a team to support that it would be wrong to generalize all Highlanders fans as Ndebele and all Dynamos fans as Shona. There are many Shona people who support Highlanders, a team with a huge following in Harare, as can be seen when they play in the city. Dynamos also have a strong loyal base in Bulawayo, a city with high concentration of Ndebele. Though ethnicity plays an important part in football in Zimbabwe, it is not the only determining factor, as Chiweshe (2011) has shown that Dynamos fans are drawn from different ethnic groups and defy any singular ethnic definition.

There are however other rivalries in Zimbabwean football, but this one provides important insights into politics, identity and belonging in a post-colonial setting. Daimon (2010) outlines the gendered nature of football fandom in Zimbabwe arguing that stadiums are arenas for the display of masculinity and most women prefer not to attend these stadia. Violence and hooliganism are also integral parts of football. For example, Dynamos have got the 'Vietnam' (named after the Vietnam War) stand in their home ground Rufaro stadium, and Highlanders have got the 'Soweto' (named after a group of suburbs inhabited by black South Africans in Johannesburg) stand in Barbourfields stadium which are no go areas for supporters if a rival team and if found there the likelihood of being assaulted physically and verbally is great (Mangezvo 2006). Madzimbamuto (2003) focuses on a stampede on Sunday 9 July 2000, in a match between Zimbabwe and South Africa at the National Sports Stadium in Harare. On that day fans lost their lives after the police fired teargas into the crowd. He shows how football fandom in Africa can be a deadly endeavour due to many factors which promote violent outcomes at matches.

Zenenga (2011) argues that soccer in Zimbabwe is punctuated by many meanings that define the moral and intellectual character of communities. The game was part of the colonial conquest yet locals have 'appropriated the sport to express local, regional and national feelings and cultural identities' (Zenenga 2011, 323). Football is thus an important part of the social and cultural fabric of Zimbabwe. There is a relationship between football discourse and contemporary political life in Zimbabwe. The 2013 election in the country saw political parties expropriating football imagery

in their campaigns (Ncube 2014). Football thus goes beyond the stadium to mirror political and social life. As such, the experiences of female fans in stadiums in many ways mirror societal beliefs about women. The harassment and abuse that women suffer are shaped by societal norms that promote certain types of masculinity within stadiums. This paper thus focuses on how women respond to football stadium in a space where football is firmly entrenched in the social and political way of life.

### Women fans from across the world

The misogynistic treatment of female fans, players or administrators in stadiums seems to transcend national borders. Women's relationship with soccer is often fraught with contestations of female invasion of male spaces. Caudwell (1999), for example, argues that for women 'playing football, an activity clearly constructed as male, affects players' subjectivity, in particular their gender identity'. Football construction as a male space thus affects how female players define themselves. This is also true for female fans who are forced to define their fan identities juxtaposed to this hostility towards them. What is interesting in Caudwell's study is how some female players were able to use football to 'invert sexual norms' (Caudwell 2002, 41) and challenge heterosexual femininity. As women penetrate male spaces they also begin to reconfigure and reorient specific identities about their personhood. As I focus on responses of female fans in Zimbabwe, it is interesting to note how being a fan is used as a vehicle by some women to question hegemonic narratives about femininity. By coming to stadiums women are challenging the male domination of sports consumption. This is largely viewed by many male supporters as an invasion of man-only spaces and their appropriation of male powers and privileges.

Female fans have for a long time been accused of being 'fickle' or fake yet. Dalpian et al. (2013) show that women have genuine bonds with their teams that define their social identities. They note that:

... a strong tendency was detected by the fanatical women in assuming their identification with their club as an important facet of their personality. They use this facet as a positive interpersonal relationship facilitator or as a conflict catalyst. The belonging sentiment and the rites involving their clubs (e.g. stadium presence) appear to be important components of the interviewees' social identity... There is among the respondents and the clubs a relationship of, a certain way, sacred characteristics – that demands constant and unconditional support, geographical extrication and routine moderating effects. (Dalpian *et al.* 2013, 10)

For Ahuvia (2005) female fans connect to their clubs in affective ways that are intrinsic to their self-identities. Female football fans thus identify strongly with their clubs and being a fan is an integral part of how they define themselves. Yet Anderson (2007) shows that female American football spectators are often addressed as ignorant girlfriends, wives, friends, daughters, sisters and mothers of all-knowing male viewers. Women thus constantly have to defend their 'fan credentials' whilst navigating male-dominated spaces.

Curi (2008) shows how women were an integral part of the contingent of Brazilian fans who were at the 2006 Germany World Cup. In Norway, football remains the most popular sport for females in general and for female youth in particular, yet representation of women as players or fans remains unequal (Skille 2008). In Israel, Ben-Porat (2009, 883) notes that: 'The (male) Israeli spectator is likely to believe that football is a man's game and the presence of "the other sex" in the terraces is unnatural: What the hell is she doing in the stadium?'. Men feel as if they own the game and the stadiums. Stadiums have been created and recreated as male domains where women can appear in prescribed roles such as wives, girlfriends, mothers or

sisters of the players. The genuine female fan, in love with football, is disputed by most male fans across the world. Moreira (2013) blames this stereotyping of women as ‘fake fans’, on sex typing of sports within Western culture in which sport is constructed as a masculinised activity. Pfister, Lenneis, and Mintert (2013) argue that female football fans who go to stadiums will suffer a measure of sexism. Women can use a variety of ways to cope with the sexism. One way is to adopt the men’s perspectives in order to be accepted as ‘authentic fans’.

In Pfister, Lenneis, and Mintert’s (2013) study, women reacted to men’s domination in the football stadium by founding a women-only fan group that allows them to find a way to be both women and fans. This is a radical move which ensures that women redefine fandom on their own terms. It allows for the emergence of other forms of fandom which are not based on patriarchal and masculine ideas. In this way women can ‘occupy’ certain spaces within the stadium. Erhart (2011) provides an interesting account of the fan group Ladies of Besiktas which is an all women fan club founded in 2006. The group support Besiktas club in Turkey and the group was formed to fight sexism in the terraces. The group marches into Besiktas’s İnönü Stadium dressed in identical black and white scarves and jackets and blow whistles to mute the male fans that use vulgar language (Erhart 2011).

In a study in England, Jones (2008) interviewed 38 female fans and concluded that women use 3 basic strategies to cope with sexism and homophobia within stadiums. First, they expressed disgust at abuse, sometimes redefining fandom to exclude abusers. Second, they downplayed sexism. Their third strategy was to embrace gender stereotypes, arguing that femininity was inconsistent with ‘authentic’ fandom and that abuse was a fundamental part of football (Jones 2008, 516).

These strategies reflect how stadiums are created with a unique culture and set of rules based on male experiences. Women have to find ways to fit into these cultures and accept that there is a level of exclusion through sexism and degradation. One of the ways is for women to downplay misogyny. Many female fans ignore misogynist occurrences or make light of them, even though they would never accept those same occurrences in any other part of their social life (Selmer and Sülzle 2008). Selmer (2004, 92) quotes one female ‘Of course, I’ve heard words like “cunt”, but not addressed to me.’ Female fans are forced to rationalise abusive language to ‘fit in’. The implication however is that when women accept and ignore sexist and homophobic language they become themselves part of football as a male world and accept its rules. Women cannot however question this because, ‘If you as a woman on the terraces criticise sexist occurrences that might be signing off your status as fan. Discriminating comments or actions do draw a line, they invoke in- and exclusions’ (Selmer and Sülzle 2008, 8). Female agency is thus limited by the need to belong, to be part of the group and to be seen as one of the boys.

### Methodology

The paper is based on a qualitative research paradigm which sought to provide a nuanced understanding of the experiences of women fans in Zimbabwe. Qualitative methodologies are strong in that the use of interviews and observations provides a deep, rather than broad, set of knowledge about a particular phenomenon, and they are appropriate to investigate cognitive and affective aspects of fandom (Jones 1994). They allow for a better understanding of psychological factors such as affect and cognition which are important in sports fandom (Jones 1994). The study utilised in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to ensure that voices of female fans are properly documented and outlined. As an exploratory study into female fan identities in Zimbabwe, the study sought a small sample to allow for in-depth investigation. A sample of 30 women was selected from women attending games at Rufaro Stadium in Harare. The stadium is used by Harare based teams which, at the time of the research, included Dynamos,

Harare City, Monomotapa and Motor Action. They were chosen from six different teams over a period of three weeks to ensure a level of representativeness of teams in the league. The reasons for supporting the teams were largely influenced by older male relatives, male partners and friends. Some of the interviews were held before the matches whilst most were conducted midweek. Informal discussions with these fans before and after matches also provided interesting insights into female fandom.

A further 10 participants were selected using convenience sampling as these were women who were no longer attending matches due to the misogynistic atmosphere. I asked women who attended matches whether they knew others who had quit coming to the stadiums as a result of abuse and harassment. Two focus group discussions with five participants each were conducted. The participants were chosen from those who were already interviewed. One group had women who still attended matches and the other group had women who no longer attended matches. The whole study thus focused on the lived experiences of 40 female fans whose age ranged between 22 and 43 years of age. Whilst the sampling framework offers a high probability of bias, it was the most appropriate framework to use given the lack of a sampling frame. Fans in Zimbabwe are not centrally registered though there are fan groups for certain clubs. To counter bias, the study sought to interview fans from six different clubs, ages and diverse social backgrounds.

Out of 40 women, 16 were married, 2 were divorced whilst the rest were in relationships. In terms of employment, 32 women were informally employed in various trades including second-hand clothing, cross-border trade, hairdressing and selling food. All the women were black Zimbabweans'. All of the women mostly come to watch the matches with male partners, friends and relatives though in the past some of the women come to games alone or with female friends. Whilst 40 respondents appear to be a small number given the popularity of the game in Zimbabwe, this study is an exploratory exercise which does not seek to make inferences to representativeness of all women who attend matches.

The study sought to offer a situated analysis of the experiences of sampled women without making any assumptions of universal application of the research findings. In this paper, I provide another way of analysing stadium culture and experiences using a gender lens. Related to this, it is important to highlight issues of my social location and positionality relating to study of this nature. I am a male researcher and talking to female fans provided unique challenges around access to fans. It was however made easy through building rapport with fans (both male and female) by regularly attending matches for years before the study. Knowledge of stadium culture and my previous experience researching fan culture in Zimbabwe provided important insights that allowed female fans to be comfortable relating their experiences to a male researcher.

## Findings and discussion

### *Singing with the boys: women as active agents within stadiums*

Some female fans join in the singing and abusive language. One of the interviewed women indicated that it is all part of being a fan (In depth interview, 11 March 2013, Mt Pleasant). The stadium has a unique language and culture. According to this respondent anyone who comes to the stadium should be aware of this or else they should stay away. She questioned why women should be seen as powerless victims who cannot hold their own in a men's world. Another women interviewed noted that,

kana tauya bhora tinotoimba sevamwe kuzvinakidze. Hazvina basa kuti zvinyadzi, ndozvekubhora izvozvo. Handiti tinoimba zvemahure because ariko. Saka chinoshamisa pahure chii? Tinotukurira mareferee futi nezvamai vake. Ndokubhora kana usingade enda unogara kushade [when we come to the stadium it is to enjoy the whole atmosphere so we sing and dance with other supporters. The vulgar



songs do not bother me at all because it is part of football. We sing about prostitutes because they exist and there is nothing special about that. If you feel offended then you can always go and watch from the expensive seats]. (In-depth interview, 14 September 2012, Mabvuku)

Such women are very much part of the core group of fans who sing and dance throughout the matches. They are not at all disturbed by the nature of the language being used and its implications on constructing or demeaning female bodies.

Some women take up the role of the fan and immerse themselves in its masculine nature. They identify themselves with male fans and actually participate in singing and shouting obscenities at other women and men in the stadium. Borrowing from Caudwell's argument of female soccer players inverting sexual norms, it is clear that fans in this category are also using the stadium as a space to adopt and practice masculinities. Female fans do not see themselves as different to their male counterparts as noted by one of the research participants: '*Mukepekepe, mukepekepe hazvina basa nhengo yako yemuviri. Mukadzi kana murume supporter isupporter*' (Caps United fans are all similar whether they are men or women) (Focus group discussion, 9 August 2012, Mbare). Chiweshe (2012) has shown how stadiums offer a space for male supporters to use vulgar language which they do not normally use in other public spaces. This is also true for female fans because stadiums allow them to transcend the patriarchal demands of hetero-normativity in which women are not supposed to be loud, vulgar and outspoken.

The stadium thus allows women to take up roles that in their normal lives social norms prohibit. As noted by another participant: '*kubhora tinotaura zvatinoda. Zvese zvinoita kana kutuka munhu zvinyadzi*' (we say what we want, even vulgar language) (In-depth interview, 11 March 2013, Mt Pleasant). By taking up these masculine roles female fans are promoting and entrenching hegemonic ideas about women's bodies. Women's fans are thus participants in promoting the same system of misogyny that undermines gender equality and defines women narrowly as sex objects. Through a process of dissociation female fans actively participate in promoting processes that demean women. Such female fans are in the habit of dismissing everything feminine as weak thus within the stadium they dissociate themselves from women who are more likely to match the feminine stereotypes.

The women within this category tend to be younger and single when compared to those who had quit coming to the stadium. Whilst the sample is too small to make generalizations on the impact of age and marital status on how women respond to abuse within stadium, there is an emerging pattern that younger and single women have more space to take masculine personas within stadiums. What was also interesting from the focus group discussions was how female fans do not relate the words in the songs to themselves or other women close to them. They argued that the songs were not personal and thus were not talking about them. A research participant had this to say '*angori masongs haana kana basa aya. Hapana zita rangu kana remunhu saka unodhiniwa nei kana pataurwa zvehure kana iwe usiri hure racho*' (they are just songs and mean nothing. It is not like we are singing people's name) (In-depth interviews, 12 February 2013, Sunningdale). The songs may be misogynistic and portraying women as sexualized bodies. Within the confines of the stadium, women can redefine their gender identities and actually attack their own gender. In the focus group it was indicated how some women actually attack players for being 'weak' like women or stating, *tavaisa* (we have sexed them) to describe beating another team.

Female fans in this category also argued that not all songs are misogynistic and vulgar. They gave examples of songs that were both religious and not vulgar:

Dembare iteam, rovha ngoma usekekerere, kana ndafa musandicheme ndoenda  
*ndoga pahukama* [Dynamos is our team beat the drums and be happy, if I die do not moan, I will go  
alone]. (In depth interview, 6 February 2013, City Centre)

*Akuda kuchema asina kumborohwa* [they want to cry without being beaten]. (Focus group discussion, 14 March 2013, City Centre)

Such songs are gender neutral and allow everyone to participate and ‘showed that stadiums are not always about abusing women’. Other songs noted by women fans in this category actually sexualized male bodies. The fans argued that such songs, though few, showed how all bodies within stadiums were sexualized. They include songs such as:

*Officer mamisa mboro, officer mamisa mboro, inohaizi nguva yekumisa mboro* (Policeman why is your penis erect? This is not the time to have an erect penis). (Focus group discussion, 9 August 2012, Mbare)

*Tapinda tapinda, Hemeni Baba, tapinda, tapinda haiwa Jehovha mune ngoni* (We successes, Amen to the Lord who has mercy). (In depth interview, 6 February 2013, City Centre)

The argument by these female fans is that both men and women suffer from bad language and sexualization. There was however agreement by all women that it is mostly female fans who suffer from whistles and abusive shouts such as ‘*hure*’ (prostitute). Women in this category highlighted how they either ignore or shout back at people who shout obscenities. A fan narrated how one time part of the crowd started calling her a prostitute as she walked up the terrace and she responded, ‘*hure ndimai vako*’ (your mother is the prostitute) (in-depth interviews, 12 April 2013, Chitungwiza). Another fan noted how she is not bothered by whistles because she also does it when a woman with big buttocks walks by, as she argued: ‘*munhu akabatana akapfura hazvina kuipa kumuudza nemuridzo kuti zvinhu zvake anazvo. Even inini ndotofara maface akaridza muridzo because ndinawo maassets*’ (if a nicely shaped woman passes in front of the crowd I see no problem with whistling because we are simply appreciating her shapely body. Even myself, I am happy when men whistle at me because I have the assets) (Focus group discussion, 9 August 2012, Mbare).

Related to the above is physical harassment of women within stadiums. All respondents generally accepted and narrated various stories of being victims of back tapping, breast fondling and assault. Such acts appear rampant in games that attract huge crowds of over 20,000, such as the big derbies. Women within this category outlined various ways in which they respond to such abuse. One of the participants narrated how she once had to slap a man who had touched her buttocks and luckily the police were nearby and the man was arrested. Another noted that she always moves around with a group of male supporters so she rarely suffers this form of abuse. Being in the company of other male supporters is a form of protection against physical harassment. What was disturbing, however, is how some of the fans in this category found glee in narrating how women from rival teams are subjected to physical abuse outside the stadium some years ago. In this case, sisterhood does not exist with female fans of rival teams as noted by Dynamos Football Club fan, ‘*dzetse idzetse chete rume kana hadzi ndakarimaka. Pane pandichati nekuti tiri vakadzi tashamwari nesupporter yeHighlander*’ (A frog is a frog (nickname given to Caps United supporters) whether male or female I hate it. There is no way I can ever befriend a Highlander supporter just because she is a woman) (In-depth interview, 17 August 2012).

Within this category there are also women who do not necessarily join in the singing or use of bad language but condone it as a necessary part of fan culture. They believe that feminine traits are not compatible with behaviours expected of ‘real’ fans. One such fan noted that:

anyone who comes to the stadium should be aware of the use of vulgar language or else they should stay away. You cannot come to stadium and tell fans to change how they have been supporting their

teams for decades. I do not use vulgar language or sing the songs but within the stadium that is what happens so if you want to come then get used to it.

She questions 'why women should be seen as powerless victims who cannot hold their *own in a men's world*' (In-depth interview, 3 October 2012, Greendale). This portrayal of women as victims removes the agency of female fans who chose to embrace masculine fan behaviours. Such women are seen as victims of a system that forces them to embrace masculinity to fit in and not as active agents who are actively configuring their own unique fan identities. Fandom is a relational process which happens in interaction with others within the group. It is spatial in nature and as such the stadiums provide different context of relating along gender lines.

### ***We are here for the football: forget about the singing***

Other women ignore vulgar language of stadiums and concentrate on the football. They believe that the abuse is not enough to keep them away from stadiums. These types of women usually choose to sit away from where large numbers of male fans are located thus at times pay higher ticket prices to sit where there are not many people. Listening to vulgar songs is a small price to pay to watch their favourite team live. One of the research participants in this category argued that, 'I love football and I love my team so I come to the stadium despite the fact that I hate the language used by most male supporters' (In-depth interview 6 November 2012, City centre). From the focus group discussions, it was clear that this category of fans had accepted the state of affairs within stadiums but thought the best way to survive was to avoid the spaces where most fans sat and sing. The participants agreed that there was very little that can be done to remedy the situation as this was engrained within the football culture in Zimbabwe.

Avoidance thus forms a second major way of dealing with the phallogocentric nature of stadiums. The whole football metaphor and experience are based on a heterosexual encounter in which men dominate. Being a football fan means experiencing this metaphor every time you attend matches yet women interviewed had a different opinion. They opined that football in itself has no meaning, but rather society constructs sexual innuendos around the game. These symbolic constructions can be challenged, reconfigured and reconstructed as noted by one of the participants: '*vakuru vedu vebhora havazi serious nenyaya yekupedza zvinyadzi kubhora. Zvinopera izvi vakaisa mitemo plus kugadzirisa mastadium nepekugara. But chakanyanya kukosha kudzidzisa masupporter kuti zvakaipa kuti vakadzi nekuti ticharega kuuya kubhora masupporter oita mashoma*' [football leaders are letting us down. They should improve the stadiums and introduce measures that curb abuse of women. Most importantly they should promote awareness campaigns because they will lose out if women stop coming to games] (In-depth interview, 6 January 2013, Sunningdale).

Group discussions with women in this category showed that they were outraged by the abusive nature of the stadium but felt powerless about how to change the situation. With erratic coverage of games on television women are forced to come to stadiums if they want to watch football. Yet coming to stadiums is associated with serious problems for women. The lack of power mainly stems from what one woman called 'huge number of males versus females in stadiums. Maybe if women became the majority things will change' (In-depth interview, 23 April 2013, Avondale). Men dominate football crowds the world over and this domination reinforces the notion that stadiums are male spaces and women should stay away. Whilst this strategy of silence and avoidance makes it appear as if women are giving up the fight against stadium sexism, it is a potent tool of dismantling the patriarchal nature of football fandom. Simply being in the stadium is potent enough to challenge stereotypes and deconstruct hegemonic ideas about a 'proper fan'. As women increase in number within the stadiums in

Zimbabwe, this will ultimately impact how they respond and influence the nature of language spoken. This thesis is supported by Ben-Porat (2009), who argues that the increasing presence of women at football matches has assumed enormous significance in challenging the male hegemony over the game. Hargreaves (2000) adds that becoming female fans is metaphorically a process of conquering a piece of land in ‘men’s territory’: the football ground has always been ‘male’s land’.

### ***Stadium is not for us: women who love football but forego the stadium***

The third category of fans which I came across during this research is women who love football and their teams but now refrain from going to the stadiums. For such women the level of misogyny is driving away many potential fans in a country where football teams desperately need as many fans as they can. In an interview with one of the fans in this category she noted that:

We have a serious problem in this country with marketing our sports and soccer in general. Women are the majority of the population and offer a potential huge market for football teams yet very little is being done to court this market. What you get is stadiums full of vulgar and abusive language. (Focus group discussion, 14 March 2013, City Centre)

Many women thus avoid stadiums and opt to follow the games via radio, online and sometimes on television. Quitting the stadium means protesting with your money, and clubs in Zimbabwe have not done anything to remedy the situation. My informal discussions with some club officials highlighted that they are not interested in improving stadium experience for women. They argued that the vulgar and abusive fans have been loyal to the league for many years and as such they cannot afford to alienate them on the promise that more female fans will come. The official noted how there are many other reasons such as finances, time and family commitments that limit the number of women fans at stadiums. There is thus very little will amongst administrators to combat misogyny within stadiums.

Staying away from games has thus done very little for women who wish to change fan cultures. What is clear is that misogynistic language has been accepted as part of football culture. It is engrained within the psyche of male fans (Chiweshe 2012, 18):

Fandom is a bastion of hegemonic masculinity. Football stadiums provide an arena in which masculinity is constructed around a clear and distinct set of defining norms. Exaltation of manhood is part of football in Zimbabwe. The songs and chants tell a story of masculine domination of an opponent which is feminised.

Women who love football are forced to suffer on in silence. Complaining is met by accusations of being ‘fake fans’ by male counterparts. To be accepted female fans have to accept masculine norms within stadiums. Boycotting the stadium is thus the only option for women who cannot ignore or participate in fan cultures. Women in this category also complained that being in the stadium met with negative stereotype and stigma from other women in their communities. ‘Decent’ women cannot be seen at soccer stadiums unless in the company of their husbands. Thus, there is also a social stigma against women who attend matches on their own without male company.

### **Conclusion**

The discussion has provided an insight into how female football fans in Zimbabwe cope with the phallogocentric and misogynistic nature of football stadiums. It highlighted three categories of

female fans namely: fans who join and act like men; fans who ignore and avoid parts of the stadium with singing fans and fans who avoid the stadiums altogether. Stadiums are socially constructed as men only spaces and as such women who venture into this territory will suffer some form of sexism whether directly or indirectly. The need to belong and be part of the group leads to many women taking up male fan behaviours and becoming 'one of the boys'. Discussions above have shown how this process of dissociation further entrenches widely held stereotypes about women and femininity. Other women were shown to favour avoidance by choosing seats within the stadium where there is less singing and thus less vulgar or foul language. Such seats tend to be in more expensive parts of the stadium, but still they are not immune to abuse in these areas. Women still come to games because they love football but feel they can do little to change the status quo. The paper also highlights women who have altogether quit the stadium. Such women see no need in being in a place where the demeaning of women is proudly practiced. They still love football but would rather follow it using radio, television, the Internet or newspapers. Thus, the above discussion has provided an analysis to these varying coping mechanisms employed by female fans.

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