Sex, Football, and the Media
The case of South Africa and the 2010 FIFA World Cup

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Abstract
This study examines how gender interplays with the news agenda during a very large scale event, in a country still undergoing political transition and where journalism plays a significant role in the nation-building process. The present study brings new knowledge to this area by examining the news agendas in South Africa on a specific gender-related issue: the rights of sex workers and trafficking victims, concerning men and children as well, but women in particular. This issue is often debated in connection with global sports events such as the World Cup. Drawing on interviews with media practitioners and on discourse analysis, the purpose of this study was to examine the news discourse on sex labour and trafficking and the connection with the 2010 FIFA World Cup. The findings suggest that the media discourse during the event was permeated with the rhetoric of nation-building. The combination of sport, media, and nationalism in a country in transition resulted in the ‘symbolic annihilation’ (Tuchman, 1978b) of a specific gender issue.

Key words: trafficking, prostitution, gender, journalism, South Africa, transition, 2010 FIFA World Cup, mega-event, soccer, football
Introduction

The opening ceremony of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa was seen by millions of viewers all over the world. The newspapers and TV and radio broadcasts provided a venue for the discursive formation of feelings of identity and belonging that few other cultural forms create to the same extent as football. However, one of the media debates surrounding the event was the case of sex work and trafficking, following proposals from high officials that sex work should be made legal during the period of the World Cup 2010. The arguments were several; it would help to better regulate and control the sex industry, it would increase tax revenue as well as reduce rape as men would have better access to sex (Hartley 2009; BBC 2008; Simelane 2009) However, despite these demands, prostitution was not legalized in time for the World Cup.

The aim of this study is to contribute to an understanding of how gender interplays with the news agenda during a large scale event, in a country still undergoing a political and democratic transition and where journalism plays a significant role in nation-building.

Feminist research has long viewed the world of sport as a male hegemony and a homosocial sphere, where maleness prevails and women are excluded (Messner 2002:92). Journalism in South Africa is no exception – women comprise less than 20 per cent of the news sources (GMMP 2010:68). The issue that remains in dispute is how this insensitivity to women’s issues is shaped in the newsroom. The present study brings new knowledge to this area by examining the news agendas in South Africa on a specific gender-related issue: the rights of sex workers and trafficking victims, including men and children, but women in particular. This issue is often debated in connection with global sports events such as the World Cup. Drawing on interviews with media practitioners and on discourse analysis, the purpose of this study was to examine the news discourse on sex labour and trafficking and the connection with the World Cup 2010.
Background

The 2010 FIFA World Cup was the first to take place in Africa. It was heralded as the first real opportunity for South Africa, as well as the African continent, to become an equal player on the global stage, getting rid of stereotypes, and showing its best side.

In connection with the previous World Cup, held in Germany in 2006, the question of sex trafficking and sex labour became an international concern. It was predicted that 40,000 women and children would be brought to Germany to serve the ‘needs’ of millions of football fans. Faced with this information, the Swedish ombudsman for equality argued that the Swedish team should boycott the event. I covered this issue at the time, while working as a news reporter for the Swedish national public service broadcaster; I clearly recall the massive headlines resulting from this argument, and the media debate that followed. Although the numbers of trafficking victims later turned out to be largely exaggerated (Tavella 2007) the question was still raised of a potential linkage between large international sporting events and an increase in the number of sex workers and victims of trafficking.

This debate is politically sensitive in South Africa, considering the history of apartheid with its laws against inter-racial coupling (Ratele 2009). There have been long periods of silence on sexuality in African countries at all levels of society, but phenomena such as the HIV/AIDS epidemic, emancipation movements, and violence against women have brought the topic back to the agenda (Oinas & Arnfred 2009; Mkhwanazi 2010:83-85). However, South African political scientists have stated that the national emancipation movement in South Africa has been pre-occupied with policymaking while women in their daily lives see no real change for the better (Gouws 2004; Hassim 2006:260). Media researchers claim that the South African media have failed to address gender issues even at a minimum level (GMMP 2010:106). The reporting mostly focuses on women’s public participation in society, such as taking on leading and decision-making positions, and omits happenings in the private sphere (Buiten 2009).

It is important to point out that this study will not debate the extent to which the World Cup did or did not create an influx of sex workers and trafficking. It will focus solely on how the connections between prostitution, trafficking and the World Cup were reported during the year before the World Cup by news media in Cape Town. One might
wonder why the media should cover this issue in particular while reporting on a global sports event. Aren’t there numerous more relevant items and angles in connection with the World Cup? I argue that this was an important topic, considering the following points:

- According to the United Nations, South Africa is a regional centre for men, women and children who are forced into trafficking (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2004).
- There is still no legislation against trafficking in South Africa.
- Since 1988, it has been illegal to sell sexual services in South Africa. However, Cape Town has several areas known for prostitution (Bird & Donaldsson 2009:37-38).
- The boundaries between prostitution and trafficking are becoming increasingly blurred, and overlap in many ways including demographic characteristics of the victims, the way they are exploited, and the injuries they suffer from (Farley 2003).
- The debate around prostitution and trafficking during the World Cup in Germany should have piqued journalists’ interest in investigating the topic in South Africa.

Discourses of transition

As South Africa stands on the brink of its third decade of democracy, the question of how to measure and evaluate the process of ‘democratization’ has been the subject of much political thought and theory (Huntington 1991; Dahl 1989). Several of the media scholars studying South Africa see transition to democracy as an open-ended process, rather than a discrete event confined to the period of the democratic elections in 1994 (Skare-Orgeret 2006; Berger 2000). The South African media scholar Lynette Steenveld (2002) has discussed the discourse of transformation in South Africa from these elections onwards. A ‘new’ South Africa was born, standing in opposition to the ‘old’ nation with its characteristic oppression of class, ethnicity, and gender (Steenveld 2002:64). The discourse of transformation in South Africa is marked by three terms: the rainbow nation, reconciliation, and nation-building (Steenveld 2002:64). On the night in 1994 when Nelson Mandela won South Africa’s first democratic election, the new president gave a speech that invoked a national, com-
mon identity in the country: ‘we might have our differences, but we are one people with a common destiny in our rich variety of culture, race and tradition.’ (Billig 1995:97). However, the ideology that was needed to understand the past in order to build a new nation, did not contain the necessary search for ‘a new sense of national identity’ (Steenveld 2002:65). The process of improving people’s basic material living conditions (the Reconstruction and Development Program/RDP) has been slow, the crime rate is high, and HIV/AIDS is still a pandemic.

Media and transition

The sociologist Francis B. Nyamnjoh has discussed the role of the media in Africa since the 1990s, describing the development as ‘democratization in a context of growing obsession with belonging […] central to understanding democracy in Africa and the role of the media in promoting it.’ (Nyamnjoh 2005:1-3). The transition in South Africa has resulted in a profound transformation of the ruling political elite, the ANC, the African National Congress. In addition, in comparison to other countries in transition, the constitution and legislation of South Africa are strongly protective of the issues of human and civil rights (Sparks 2011:13). However, South Africa is a parliamentary democracy dominated by one party, and there is no overwhelming opposition. In recent years, there has been an increasing pressure from the ANC over the content and management of the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC; Tomaselli and Tett-Tomaselli 2008). The print media – now primarily owned by black South Africans including ‘powerful black editorial figures’ (ibid.:174) – has been a safer environment for critical journalism. The relationship between South African politics and the media has been characterized as ‘a tame and compliant broadcaster on the one hand, and a generally adversarial press on the other’ (ibid.). However, a recent government proposal that allows fines and imprisonment for journalists seems to be ‘designed to ensure that the media can no longer play a campaigning role against corruption and abuse of power’ (Sparks 2011:14). In addition, the influence of the print media can be considered relatively small, as few outside the urban communities have access to, or are able to read, newspapers. The SABC on the other hand have several radio stations and television channels, broadcasting in all the official languages of South Africa.
Transition and the public sphere

Sports journalism is a unique and highly effective way to create a sense of unity in a country (Whannel 2008). The unifying power of national and especially international very large scale sports events, such as the Super Bowl, the Olympics, and the FIFA World Cup, has resulted in ‘orgies of both nationalism and commodification’ (Rowe 2004:23). Sport as media events can be seen as contributing to the shaping, although a partial and contested process, of what Anderson (1983) called the imagined community. This was apparent on the occasion when South Africa hosted and won the 1995 Rugby World Cup (Steenveld & Strelitz 1998). Steenveld and Strelitz used Dahlgren’s (1995) four-dimensional model of the public sphere as a framework to discuss how the media used the 1995 Rugby World Cup to put the ANC’s policy of nation-building at the center of their reporting (Steenveld 1998:615). Drawing on Habermas (1989), Dahlgren describes the public sphere as a ‘social space where information, ideas and debate can circulate in society, and where political opinion can be formed’ (1995:ix). The interaction between the four dimensions – media institutions, media representation, social structure, and social interaction – shapes the nature of the public sphere (ibid.:11-21). This model will also be used as a theoretical framework in the present study, as it is particularly relevant to studying the interaction between the media, its product, and the social structure in transitional countries.

Gender and the Public Sphere

To identify more closely how the picture of a particular gender aspect of the FIFA World Cup 2010 was formed, this study employs a discourse analytical approach. It is in line with Fairclough’s (1995) notion of contextualizing what is said and its historical, social, and cultural aspects. Discourse in media language can be defined as the specific ways to describe and create knowledge about certain objects, events, individuals, or groups. According to cultural theorists, these representations consist of cultural values and norms about the world (Hall 1997:6). Thus, a deeper theoretical understanding of a media discourse can be obtained by ‘close familiarity with what is said and not said, and how it is said – the topics, the coverage, the debates, the rhetoric, the modes of address, etc. […]’ (Dahlgren & Sparks 1993:19). Discourse analysis is a way of thinking – it is grounded in the belief that our view of the world could have been different, and therefore it tries to deconstruct what we take as evident
(Engström 2008:37). Since the 70’s, feminist media researchers have claimed that these media discourses are dominated by a masculine perspective (Whitlow 1977; Tuchman 1978a; Gallagher 1981; van den Wijngaard 1992; Creedon 1993; Van Zoonen 1994, 1998; De Bruin & Ross 2004; Opoku-Mensah 2004; Z Roxberg 2010). The media reflects the dominant values in society and journalism has historically been a male domain, where men have dominated. This has resulted in a ‘symbolic annihilation’ of women, both within the organizations and in the material that is produced (Tuchman 1978b). However, as Van Zoonen points out, media production is ‘neither a straight-forward derivative of the malicious intents of capitalist male owners, nor is it merely the product of the sexist inclinations of media professionals’ (1994:30). According to van Zoonen, media production consists of a complex process with tensions between individuals who have different professional views and personal values and opinions. There is also the struggle to create unique journalism without losing appeal to a broad range of readers, listeners and viewers (ibid.). This audience, in turn, interprets the message from the media in their own specific cultural, social and individual context (ibid.:40).

Thus, studying gender discourse in the news should stem from two related starting points, seeing news both as a product and as a process (Skidmore 1998:205). The next section gives a closer examination of the methodology behind this analysis in the present study.

The study

This study monitors a specific media debate and its development over time examining the extent to which the issue appeared in the news, how it was portrayed, what was emphasized and what was not covered. The study was conducted in two parts; through archive search and interviews.

Archive search

The first part of my research design was to closely monitor how the connection between prostitution, trafficking and the World Cup was covered by the leading news provider in Cape Town: the daily English language morning newspaper Cape Times and its sister publication Cape Argus, which is published in the afternoons. They are owned by Independent Newspapers, with more than 30 daily and weekly newspaper titles in
Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal and the Western Cape. The *Cape Times* in 2011 had 231 000 average issue readers. The title is aimed at the ‘upmarket reader, with an emphasis on corporate news’ (Readership Fact Sheet, *Cape Times*). The *Cape Argus* in 2011 had 321 000 average issue readers. The title is aimed at readers that are ‘independent minded and have an entrepreneurial flair’ (Readership Fact Sheet, *Cape Argus*). A majority of the readership of both newspapers are white or coloured, black or Indian readers form a minority (ibid.).

The articles that were selected were chosen as they contained certain keywords that were employed in the archive search; ‘prostitution’, ‘trafficking’, ‘sex workers’, and ‘sex industry’. Each of these words was combined with the keyword ‘World Cup’. The search went back to 11 June 2009, one year before the event, and ended on 11 July 2010, the day the final game of the World Cup was played. This period is the most interesting to study, as the media logic allows the coverage of the World Cup to intensify closer to the event. I do not mean to suggest that I have managed to examine the full scope of articles on this subject during the period, as I cannot guarantee that the digital on-line archive is comprehensive. In addition, the search engine of the archive does not allow truncation. In any case, the scope of the data is a total of 83 articles.

**Field-work**

To fully interpret the journalistic text, it needs to be contextualized and seen from the collective editorial process by which it is formed (Fairclough 1995; Hultén 2000). Therefore, after I had begun the discourse analysis of the articles, I visited South Africa in June and July 2010 and conducted research interviews with media practitioners at the *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus*.

However, the issue was covered by several media institutions. Therefore these interviews were complemented with interviews at all the major newsrooms in Cape Town, in order to more completely understand the reporting on the FIFA World Cup, and more specifically on trafficking and prostitution. Thus, interviews where also made with journalists at the following newsrooms:

1. SABC, the national public service TV and radio broadcaster.
2. E-TV, the leading commercial TV-station in South Africa.

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3. News 24, South Africa’s premier online distributor.
4. Die Burger, a daily newspaper in Afrikaans, which is circulated in the Western and Eastern Cape provinces.
5. Independent Online, a site that serves a number of South African Newspapers, including the Cape Times and Cape Argus, the Star, Pretoria News, Daily Tribune and the Daily Voice.

The discourse analysis of the content in the Cape Times and the Cape Argus was initiated before the fieldwork in South Africa, and so I knew that the topic I was particularly interested in had not been substantially covered, at least not by these two newspapers. The interviews were used as a source to gain more knowledge (Zelditch 1962) of how and why the media organizations covered (or failed to cover) trafficking and prostitution. The informants spoke as representatives of their organizations, and none of them asked to be anonymous, but I have chosen not to quote them with workplace, name and title, as the issue can be delicate and controversial.² The informants were both male and female and included editors-in-chief, managing editors, news editors and editors. Among other things, these media practitioners were asked what they had found to be the major stories in connection with the World Cup. I also inquired in particular how they had reported on trafficking and prostitution in connection with the event. In addition, there were questions regarding whether there had been any specific difficulties covering an event of this scale, such as for instance government interference or audience opinions.

The opportunity to visit South Africa during the World Cup also deepened my understanding of the event, embracing the magnitude and the culture that surrounded it, and feeling the joy that South Africans felt about hosting the World Cup. However, this sense of pride dazzled even the journalists, a situation that will now be further described.

Findings and analysis

The scope of 83 articles, mostly in the news sections, in the Cape Times and the Cape Argus on the issue of prostitution, trafficking and the World Cup may sound like a substantial coverage. However, divided over the

² The quotations have been slightly adjusted in the sense that spoken language has been amended, without interfering with the content.
thirteen months of the study period, this comprises only between one and four articles per month for both papers.

Symbolic annihilation

The media discourse on the World Cup was not dominated by reporting on prostitution and trafficking. It can be regarded as an example of a symbolic annihilation of an important issue that only made the front-page on two occasions, both of them in the Cape Argus. In September 2009, there was an article about ’scores of brothels’, operating in Cape Town’s city bowl and suburbs. In May 2010 there was a report on a Serbian war criminal who was hiding out in South Africa and was connected to ’sleaze wars’ over control of the sex industry in South Africa before the World Cup.

The development of the coverage of the topic followed a similar pattern in both the newspapers. The topic had its first peak six months before the World Cup, with reports on new concerns about sexual exploitation of children and police trying to clean up the streets with raids against brothels, and clients of prostitutes, in particular an infamous building in central Cape Town known for drug-dealing and prostitution.

![Figure 1: Number of articles.](image)

The next peak was two months before the World Cup, when, to give an example, the Argus reported that there was a sufficient supply of con-
doms for the whole tournament, and football fans were urged to ’remain responsible while having a good time’.

Male-dominated discourse

Even though prostitution and trafficking mostly concerns women and children, men dominated in the media discourse surrounding it. The women concerned were rarely given a chance to speak for themselves and give their side of the story. Instead the spokespersons were male. People in the sex industry were very rarely used as sources; the newspapers seldom talked directly to them on the issue. The Cape Times interviewed them in one article, and the Cape Argus in five articles. Instead other actors spoke for them. In this study, a source is defined as a person or organization that was allowed to make a direct or indirect statement in the article. The most common sources in the articles were public authorities, including members of parliaments and representatives of the ANC, the Democratic Alliance, and the African Christian Democratic Party, as well as ministers from, for example, the health and the justice departments. Two other sources that were quoted on several occasions were Dan Plato, the mayor of Cape Town and JP Smith, mayoral committee member for safety and security.

FIFA was one of the least quoted sources. The organization was quoted only twice in the Cape Argus in connection with prostitution, trafficking and the World Cup. When it was quoted on the issue, a male perspective dominated. With 101 days to go, FIFA secretary general Jérome Valcke took the media on a tour of the newly built multimillion dollar stadium, lyrically praising the venue. Later in the article he was asked about the plan that the city had to clear the streets of prostitutes ahead of the tournament. Valcke answered that the issue of prostitution and the World Cup was a myth, and that it was not an issue for FIFA. In another article in the same issue Valcke expanded on the subject, saying that sex work exists throughout the world, even in Zürich where FIFA has its headquarters, and where he said prostitution is very well organized according to the Swiss system.

3 'A million condoms for World Cup Fans’, Cape Argus, 3 June 2010.
4 'FIFA man waxes lyrical over city stadium’s perfect pitch’, Cape Argus, 1 March 2010.
5 'Fifa says 2010 sex work not its problem’, Cape Argus, 1 March 2010.
Figure 2  Sources in the articles.

Themes in the articles

Despite Valcke calling it a myth, the question of whether prostitution and trafficking would increase ahead of the World Cup was the most common theme in the reporting on the issue by the Cape Times and the second most common theme in the Cape Argus. In the present study, a ‘theme’ is defined as a journalistic perspective on a certain issue. Different themes on prostitution and trafficking were identified in the articles, with some articles containing several themes.

NGOs, police officers and researchers repeated over and over again in the newspapers that between 40,000 and 100,000 women and children were trafficked into Germany for the World Cup in 2006 and that the same thing would happen in South Africa. The reporters rarely questioned these statements. While some articles revealed that this statistic had been proved to be a myth, it was still reported as a fact in other articles. For example, in an article published in March 2010, the AIDS Foundation of South Africa called the predictions ‘sensationalism and exaggeration’. Six days later, the Cape Times again reported that 100,000 people could be trafficked into South Africa during the World Cup.

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7 ‘Tough new trafficking law won’t be passed in time for the World Cup’, Cape Times, 17 March 2010.
Tourists wanting sex

The concern about every aspect surrounding the World Cup, and the need for a successful event to help build the nation, permeated South Africa. In the media, the discussion on prostitution and trafficking therefore was also constructed from the needs and the perspectives of the tourists. One chronicle wanted to talk straight: ‘Face it, there will be a contingent of geriatric sex maniacs’. The Cape Argus in particular discussed whether and how many of the tourists would actually want to buy sex during the tournament. Some of these articles linked sex and football, seeing access to prostitutes as part of the entertainment around the game. A children’s rights organization stated that: ‘Soccer is a man’s game. There will be an increase in the demand for prostitution’. The South African National Aids Council (Sanac) and the non-profit organization Sex Workers Education and Advocacy Taskforce (Sweat) proposed that condoms should

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8 ‘Never mind stadiums, what have we laid on for the flood of geriatric sex maniacs’, Cape Times, 16 June 2009.
be branded with football balls during the event.\textsuperscript{10} When the mayor Dan Plato strongly opposed the idea, saying that prostitution would not be promoted through the World Cup, a chronicle called him a ‘wimp’.\textsuperscript{11}

At the beginning of June 2010, just a few days before the event, the \textit{Argus} reported that 200,000 condoms would be distributed to football fans in Cape Town. In the same article, the Cape Town tourism chief executive stated that sex tourism was part of the entertainment offered during the event: ‘The adult entertainment and sex industry is growing globally and visitors want that’.\textsuperscript{12}

Ten days into the tournament, the \textit{Argus} followed up on the fears of a shortage of condoms.\textsuperscript{13} However, the next day some people in the sex industry said that the number of clients had been disappointingly low. The \textit{Cape Times} concluded that nothing comes between a man and his sport, ‘not even sex’.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Sex as business}

The media discourse around prostitution seems to have been that prostitution was not a problem but rather a form of entertainment, particularly in connection with football. Hence, journalists could routinely discuss sex for sale as a business, and the possible financial benefits that the World Cup might bring to this industry. A masculine perspective was applied to an issue that mostly concerns women.

The sex industry in Cape Town was reported to be preparing for ‘a bumper season’. The manager of Chicago Gentlemen’s Club said she would ‘definitely be recruiting more ladies’ for the World Cup, while Jade, a private escort, said: ‘I’m very excited about 2010. It’s going to be a fun time in Cape Town. I can’t wait.’\textsuperscript{15} A few days later there was another report, drawing on a study published a year earlier, on the rising number of brothels in the city suburbs, many operating under the disguise of guest houses. The organization Sweat stated that these brothels would

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Nuts to the idea of branding condoms with soccer balls’, \textit{Cape Times}, 16 December 2009.
\textsuperscript{11} ‘Sweating it out to persuade the mayor there’s more to life than platonic love’, \textit{Cape Times}, 5 January 2010.
\textsuperscript{12} ‘A million condoms for World Cup fans’, \textit{Cape Argus}, 3 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{13} ‘City keeping up with Cup condom demand’, \textit{Cape Argus}, 21 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{14} ‘Just in: World Cup addiction has got paid-for sex licked’, \textit{Cape Times}, 22 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{15} ‘Sex industry excited about bumper 2010’, \textit{Cape Argus}, 15 September 2009.
cash in on the World Cup, depending on how well they advertised themselves.\textsuperscript{16}

In February 2010 the police stated that they had found 96 new prostitutes on the streets of Cape Town. Many of them were teenagers, who said the reason that they hit the street was the prospect of big earnings during the event. According to the police, the young girls saw themselves as freelance entertainers who would quit after the World Cup.\textsuperscript{17} Three days before the World Cup a chronicle again stated that sex tourism would be part of the entertainment, and gave some tips: ‘Unfortunately, there are probably not enough local sex workers to meet this demand, usually subject to seasonal fluctuations. If, purely for the sake of argument, you are a man, remember that these frolicsome people like threesomes.’\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{Tourists at risk}

Tourists buying sex were never described in criminal terms, even though prostitution was and still is illegal in South Africa. Instead, the emphasis was on the concern that these tourists might become infected with HIV/AIDS in particular, but also other sexually transmitted diseases, from prostitutes in South Africa. As mentioned above, reporters questioned whether there would be enough condoms distributed during the tournament. In September 2009 the provincial health spokeswoman admitted that there was ‘no final condom distribution plan as yet’.\textsuperscript{19} The fear of tourists getting infected with HIV/AIDS while buying sex was brought up again in March 2010. Health officials were being grilled by the parliament for poor preparation for the World Cup. A mass condom distribution campaign had been planned but one member of parliament also asked for an AIDS education campaign to be launched: ‘This was crucial with the high HIV rate and with sex workers preparing for the influx of soccer fans.’\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{17} ‘Army of young prostitutes hits city streets’, \textit{Cape Argus}, 20 February 2010.
\textsuperscript{18} ‘It’s AA for away if you’re too much in your cups during this football playfest’, \textit{Cape Times}, 8 June 2010.
\textsuperscript{19} ‘Sex industry excited about bumper 2010’, \textit{Cape Argus}, 15 September 2009.
Reporting prostitution and trafficking: the journalists view

The interviews with journalists at the Cape Times and the Cape Argus revealed that the journalists did not consider the debate on prostitution and trafficking to be a major topic for their papers, despite their knowledge of the sex industry operating in Cape Town.

The other media companies in Cape Town shared the same view. Prostitution and trafficking were among the smaller topics in their reporting. They did report the risk of a massive influx of prostitutes and trafficking victims ahead of the World Cup, but the question disappeared from the news agenda once the event had started. The journalists described how the topic never arose, in spite of attempts to raise the issue from conservative, Christian groups in South Africa.

The journalists interviewed for this study referred to what they saw as more pressing social problems; poverty, domestic violence, criminality, drugs, and HIV/AIDS. The media companies gave the same explanation for why the topic was at the bottom of the agenda, despite their recognition of the ongoing sex industry in Cape Town: the fact that South Africa has so many other social problems to deal with, such as poverty, criminality, drugs and HIV/AIDS. These issues overshadow the problem of the sex industry. One of the journalists stated that domestic violence is a much bigger problem for women than prostitution. Another journalist reasoned in a similar way, and suggested that the sex industry involves a limited part of society and therefore the subject does not have a high priority. The journalists were aware that the people of South Africa did not have the strength to deal with all the downsides of the country.

‘Not to trivialize the prostitution issue, it is obviously very important, but we tend not to make a much of a fuss about this, in this country. People are I suppose weary in a sense of all the big stuff that is going around, people are looking for relief really from some of the big issues.’ (Journalist 1)

However, these are constant domestic issues, there to cover every day, while trafficking and prostitution became a more prominent issue specifically during the period of the World Cup. The journalists also appear not to have noticed the post-colonial aspects of the situation: rich white westerners visiting the country, and seeing access to sexual interplay as part of their entertainment.
Police and NGOs as sources

In this study, South African journalism was characterized by an uncritical form of account reporting and a lack of independent analysis and questioning by the reporters, who let the ‘cultural economy of sport’ (Rowe, 2004), where nationalism plays a central role, construct a narrative in the media where football-related prostitution was not a problem but rather a form of entertainment. FIFA’s dismissal of the issue as something that exists worldwide seems to have also affected the media view of the problem. The journalists might have unconsciously used FIFA’s attitude to justify their own lack of investigation into the extent of prostitution and trafficking.

The journalists in Cape Town thus knew about the problem, but stated that it was not that extensive and that there were other issues that were more important to report on. However, it appeared that few of the media companies had closely investigated the precise extent of prostitution and trafficking in Cape Town during the World Cup.

As shown by the discourse analysis described above, the main sources in the Cape Times and the Cape Argus were public institutions and authorities, the police, and non-governmental organizations. The journalists at the Cape Argus and the Cape Times had on several occasions received tip-offs about trafficking in Cape Town, but admitted that it is hard for journalists to investigate this subject. It could be dangerous and the newspapers were also not certain about which journalistic method should be used to prove such a statement.

This seems to have been the case in the other media companies as well. The police had told the journalists that trafficking and prostitution was a minor problem. Most of the media companies seem to have been satisfied with this answer. Consequently, the journalists relied on public sources and went no further in their investigation.

‘It has been kind of a subtext all the time that I have been an editor here, people have come and alleged that there is human trafficking going on, particularly in these clubs like the one I just described to you, but no, it would be difficult to kind of get inside those clubs and find out if those people are being held against their will.’ (Journalist 1)

The exception was one newspaper, which said it really had tried to investigate the scale of prostitution and trafficking in connection with the World Cup. Its representative stated that they had talked to several peo-
people in the sex industry and put heavy pressure on the police to make a statement, but had not managed to find any evidence of an increase.

‘Believe me, we searched all over for human trafficking, for prostitution, and we have prostitutes, of course, like every major city in the world, but we could not see that there was a huge rise in prostitutes in Cape Town. […]’ (Journalist 6)

**Gender at the bottom of the World Cup agenda**

The journalists interviewed in this study could not recall any topics other than sex, prostitution, and condom supply that specifically related to gender in the reporting on the event. The exception could be said to be News24, where the most visited page was a gallery with pictures of the wives of the English football team players; this page received over 90 000 visits.

The journalists pointed out that most of the reporting on the World Cup was on things that happened off the pitch. Most of the space in the newspapers and news programs was given over to the practical issues surrounding the event. They all gave the same answer when asked which issues they mostly reported on: infrastructure and the building of the new football stadium. The World Cup provided Cape Town with an opportunity to improve the standard of the roads, to create a more functional public transport system and to upgrade the airport. For example, the journalists stated that the event forced public authorities to establish a bus route in the inner city. The coverage of the building of the new stadium in Cape Town mostly concerned whether or not it would be ready in time.

**News reporting as part of the nation-building project**

However, the new stadium was ready in time, and June 11, 2010 saw the opening ceremony of the first FIFA World Cup on African soil. The ceremony featured 1500 performers including the Soweto Gospel Choir, and was punctuated by vuvuzela blasts. The audience included former archbishop Desmond Tutu and the United Nations secretary-general Ban-Ki Moon. A few hours later, South Africa tied 1-1 with Mexico in the opening game. South African pride was greater than ever, and the nation’s flag was to be seen everywhere. In Cape Town, every other car had South African flags strapped around the side-view mirrors and flying
from the antennas. Indeed, the scene was little different in Cape Town newsrooms; in several of those I visited, flags and pennants had been put on the walls as apparent tokens of national sentiment.

There was a generally positive attitude towards the FIFA World Cup among the journalists who participated in this study. The event had become part of the nation-building process, and they reflected on this in their reporting. One journalist admitted that their newsroom had suddenly become very patriotic. During the World Cup, their journalism had been of a lighter and more entertaining character. Several of the media companies spoke about how the World Cup was an opportunity to promote South Africa in a positive way.

‘We were not going along with the government agenda, but you realize it is for the greater good.’ (Journalist 5)

‘It has been an opportunity to really showcase the country for people, and I suppose, as journalists, we often cover fairly grim stuff, but around the world cup it has been an opportunity to “write lighter” ’ (Journalist 1)

The findings suggest that the media discourse during the event was permeated with the rhetoric of nation-building, and that journalists played a part in bringing together the ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 1983). For one editor, the World Cup was one of the biggest events in the history of South Africa. While he was aware that their reporting should be objective and factually correct, he was tired of what he saw as the negative reporting that surrounded the event. He had encouraged his reporters to constantly look for positive news angles when covering the World Cup. One example was the discussion of whether the money spent on the event should instead have been used to lower unemployment, fight crime, and create better education. The editor did not understand these claims, and told his reporters that if it had not been for the World Cup, South Africa would never have had the money in the first place. The reason for this editorial line was that positive reporting would be good for the country. However, there were cases where the editor had a hard time finding a positive angle. Cape Town already had a big stadium, and it was hard to motivate the building of yet another venue for the sake of the World Cup. The editor spoke about how he struggled to find a reason to motivate this. In the end, a colleague helped him.
‘If that is the price we are going to pay to have the World Cup in our country, it is a small price to pay. The thing was that the negative was coming in, we had to dig a little bit deeper to find the positive, and I just said to our guys, dig a bit deeper if you need to find the positive side as well.’ (Journalist 4)

**Readers reacting against negative reporting**

The positive reporting was not only driven by the journalists themselves. There was a tension between creating qualitative journalism without losing appeal to their readers, listeners and viewers. The newsrooms noticed that when they did report critically on the World Cup, this drew heated reactions from their readers, listeners, and viewers, who were unhappy that the country was being described in negative terms at a time when everybody’s eyes were turned towards South Africa. The *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus* experienced this when they wrote about security guards on strike at the stadium, a story that also received international attention.

As van Zoonen (1994:40) points out, it was evident that the readers, listeners and viewers interpreted the message from the media in their own specific cultural and social context. The self-esteem of South-Africans had been low since the harsh transformation that the country had gone through after the first democratic elections in 1994. One editor stated that the critique of their readers was driven by an anxiety about whether South Africa would actually be able to arrange this mega-event. According to the editor, this attitude changed as soon as South Africa’s football team Bafana scored against Mexico in the opening game. From this moment, the media company could not publish anything negative on the World Cup on its website without a storm of backlash in the comments. For example, a report that the captain of the Paraguay team had said that he doubted that South Africa would succeed in arranging the event, since the bus he had travelled in had broken down, drew 450 angry comments from readers who were enraged by the captain blaming South Africa instead of the bus, which had actually been provided by a sponsor.

According to another editor, the atmosphere among the South Africans could be described as a kind of nationalism that originated in this low self-esteem.

‘I know that nationalism is a dirty word in Europe, and I do not want to call it nationalism, it is something slightly less than nationalism, but South Africa suf-
fers terribly from low self-esteem [...] the overwhelming sentiment whenever we take on something like this is it is going to fail [...] This World Cup forces a lot of people to step back and say we actually were wrong, we can do this stuff, we are that good.’ (Journalist 3)

Conclusion and discussion

This study investigated the media coverage of sex work and trafficking in connection with the 2010 World Cup in South Africa. The news discourse was examined by analysing reporting on this topic in two newspapers, and also by interviewing media practitioners. The results bring new knowledge to the interplay between gender and the news agenda during a large scale event. Sex work and trafficking were not a priority in the World Cup coverage. This result was somewhat surprising, as several newspapers had seemed to focus on the issue at an early stage, well before the event started. However, once the games began, interest moved away from these issues, possibly due to sentiments of national pride and solidarity. When reports did appear, the emphasis was on the influx of prostitutes, a possible boom in the sex business, and the risk of tourists becoming infected with HIV/AIDS.

The findings illuminate how the gendered nature of journalism is shaped not only by the masculine practices of journalism, but by the entire social and historical structure in which media operates. South Africa took the opportunity to use the World Cup to face the ‘growing obsession with belonging’ (Nyamnjoh 2005:1-3) in its new democracy. This idea was promoted by the media, too, but in this case it also restricted their freedom of speech, resulting in self-censorship on a crucial aspect of the daily lives of women in South Africa. In this context, the journalists seem to have found that there was no room for critical examination, not even in relation to criminal acts such as buying sexual services. The harsher environment for critical journalism in South Africa (Sparks 2011) might well be one contributing factor. The mega-event was once again used by the media to put the ANC’s nation-building project on the agenda, echoing the media discourse surrounding the 1995 Rugby World Cup (Steenveld & Strelitz 1998). In this agenda, there was no room for social issues such as trafficking and sex labour. The nature of the public sphere was thus shaped by close interaction between the media institutions and...
a specific social structure where a country in transition searched for relief from everyday problems.

The question is, therefore, whether gender was the most important explanatory factor as to why the issue of trafficking and prostitution was not higher on the media agenda. This study shows how two different journalistic ideals were set up against each other. On the one hand, there was the investigative role of journalism, where social injustices are scrutinized. On the other, there was the role of journalism in building and strengthening the nation. In South Africa, it seems that these ideals found themselves in contradiction during the period of the World Cup. This resulted in the de-emphasizing of an issue that appeared to be too problematic for South African media, during the period where the country hosted this mega-event.

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