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From 'Safety' Zones to Public Spaces: Women's Participation in Sport in Zimbabwe

Molly Manyonganise

Introduction

This chapter focuses on gender inequalities in sport and argues that the majority of women are restrained from full participation in sporting activities due to the social construction of spaces earmarked for women and men. The focus on women emanates from the fact that in spite of achievements made by Zimbabwe in affording equal access for both men and women in the areas of education, employment, health, business, etc, the reality is that strong cultural and traditional practices restrict the progress of women in sport. The assumption of this chapter is that women are disadvantaged by the space which they culturally occupy, hence the need to interrogate the existence of these spaces in order to establish how women are restrained in their participation in sporting activities both as spectators and as sportspersons. In this chapter, safe spaces will mainly refer to the private domain of the home though references will be made to other similar spaces which restrict the participation of women in public activities such as sports.

In order to explore how the notion of spaces control women's participation in sport, interviews and discussions were conducted, involving a convenient sample of fifteen women, ten teenage girls and five men. The interviewer targeted both employed (generally those in the Central Business District of Harare) and unemployed women (house wives and single women) in Harare's high density suburb of Mabvuku in order to ascertain their involvement in sport. These interviews were conducted between September and December 2009. While interviews provide insightful analysis, newspaper reports were also analyzed for information about the treatment of women in sports and what women in Zimbabwe are doing in order to challenge the status quo. The research used a qualitative research design. Data was analysed using the discourse as well as con-

Content analysis. Content analysis was chosen for its strength in allowing the researcher to gain an understanding of reality in a subjective but scientific way. It also emphasizes an integrated examination of speech and texts and their specific contexts. On the other hand, discourse analysis was chosen for its usefulness in the study of social identities since identity reproduces and sustains power relationships between social groups. In this case, it enabled the researcher to explore how language use and behaviour construct and replicate masculine and feminine spaces as far as sport is concerned. The following are some of the research questions that were asked research participants during data collection:

1. What is the role of the family in gender socialization?
2. What challenges do women face in their attempts to participate in sporting activities either as spectators or as sportspersons?
3. What could be the source of the gender inequalities that seem to be manifesting in the sporting arena in Zimbabwe?
4. How do you view women who go to sports venues to watch sports?
5. Do you think the sporting fields are safe places for women and girls in Zimbabwe and why do you think so?
6. How does society react towards women who challenge the status quo in sporting matters?
7. What could be the role of sport in women's socio-economic development?

The research is informed by African Womanism which uses gender theory as an intellectual tool for critically analyzing discriminatory social, religious and political organizational structures (Mwale 2002). However, it should be noted that while the research is intended to be representative of all women in Zimbabwe, it is limited in that it was conducted among the Shona which is the dominant ethnic group in the country. The researcher recognizes that Zimbabwe has a heterogeneous population and that some of the findings may not be applicable to women in other ethnic groups. Future research may need to sample other ethnic groups not covered in this study.

Cultural Taboos, Gender, Sport and the Family

The family plays a pivotal role in the socialization of any child. It is within the family that children learn about gender roles. Doob (1988) states that socialization is a process by which a person becomes a member of a social group or society, learning the necessary cultural content and modes of behaviour and as a consequence, internalizing the culture of the society to which the person belongs. During primary socialization (that is, socialization that takes place in one's childhood) the family is the principal agent, that is, the child is mostly influenced by his/her parents, siblings, guardians and relatives. It is within the family that a child learns

how to behave and to relate. Waters and Crook (1990) point out that within the family of orientation, parental role models, linguistic training, cultural participation and experiences provide each member of society with cultural baggage which serves as tools for participation in later life. Hagedorn (1990) concurs with Waters and Crook when he posits that during primary socialization the child develops language and individual identity, learns cognitive skills and self-control, internalizes moral standards and appropriate attitudes and motivations, and gains some understanding of societal roles. This, therefore, implies that what children learn through their primary socialization stays with them for life. The issue that quickly comes to mind is that of gender.

Defene (2006) defines gender as 'a social category that determines one's life options, participation in the economy and the society' (<http://www.uneca.org/aec/documents/yeshiareg%20Defene.pdf>). Geeta Rao Gupta (quoted in Dube 2003:86) depicts gender as 'a culture-specific construct' determining the different kinds of work which can be done by men and women. Dube (2003:86) describes it as 'a social construct of men and women.' She contends that gender is not natural neither is it divine; it has to do with social relationships of women and men; gender can be reconstructed, and transformed by the society, for since it is culturally constructed, it can be socially deconstructed. Geeta Rao Gupta (quoted in Dube 2003:86) What we get from these definitions is that gender regulates how people relate and operate in their day-to-day lives. Consequently, it influences one's thinking, emotions, and mobility, among other things. Culture plays a central role in the construction as well as the maintenance of gender. Nock (1992) says family members give the child his/her first notion of roles in the larger society, for example, images of what it means to be male or female. Generally, society expects boys to emulate their fathers, while girls are to follow carefully in the footsteps of their mothers (Nock 1992). This is reinforced by the kinds of work assigned to boys and girls, the kinds of toys bought for them and also by the language used.

In Zimbabwe, girls do most of the domestic chores while boys have little or nothing to do. As a result, boys have a lot more time for outdoor activities as compared to girls. From an early age, boys are given all the time to explore their interests and abilities as far as sport is concerned. As they play with their plastic balls, run along the roads, jump over gullies, climb trees, etc., boys are able to identify their sporting talents. Girls, on the other hand, are discouraged from taking part in sports like soccer and such activities which demand that they exert themselves. They then concentrate on what they see their mothers do, that is, cook, wash clothes and dishes, just to mention a few, thereby replicating skills that have kept their mothers and grandmothers subjugated for generations. Even in child plays, girls often concentrate on playing their mother's roles. Socialization

makes them believe that it is their duty to make sure that when the boys come back from their recreational activities they find food on the table, warm water for their bath, clean clothes to put on – the list is endless.

From the types of toys that girls and boys are encouraged to play with, different sets of aptitudes and attitudes are developed. Girls have their aspirations affected through playing with dolls and other toys which reinforce the stereotype of women as carers as well as inculcate and reinforce the notion of female fragility. On the other hand, boys are given challenging toys such as bicycles, small cars, pistols and soccer balls. With these toys the boy child is always on his feet because the toys demand activity while the girl's toys confine her to the homestead and cool shades where they learn to associate themselves with 'safe' zones as opposed to the more daring and activity-stimulating spaces which boys venture into. Because of the confinement at home, the girls end up concentrating on the traditional sporting activities such as *nbodo*, *dumbu*,¹ which are not commercialised and therefore are not professions. As a result, boys learn to flex their muscles at an early stage in their lives as compared to their female counterparts. This helps them develop sporting skills, thus, putting them at a competitive edge over girls. This is reflected later in life especially in the professional sporting topography. Due to this early socialization, men find it easier to venture into professional sport, thus making a living out of it more than women do.

Language also plays a critical role in expressing the relationship between boys and girls and later men and women in the family and society at large. Mhuru (1996) says 'through language, the exploitative relations between girls and boys are most obviously expressed'. Among the Shona, statements like *mukadzzi anofanira kuva nemwoyo nemusha* (a woman should have a passion for the home) or *mukadzzi akanaka ndeanogara pamba* (a good woman is the one who stays at home) are often uttered. These statements construct the female child into an individual whose sole responsibility is the home. Yet, most sporting activities take place outside of the domestic sphere. This means that from an early age, the majority of girls are shut out of the sporting landscape due to societal expectations of the space they should occupy.

The patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean society fosters gender-stereotyping. These patriarchal norms and values mostly affect and are mainly felt by women and girls in their families. However, the family is just a microcosm of society at large. Patriarchy itself is and has always been associated with hierarchy where men are considered more important than their female counterparts. There is a general belief that men are better than women in terms of strength, competence, responsibility - the list is endless. Mhuru (1996) says women are socialized to dependency in male-dominated spheres as a result of this social construction Macfadden (cited in Mhuru 1996:8) As mentioned earlier, when young girls

grow up, they are socialised by mothers and women guardians who have internalized patriarchal ideals which look at women as subordinates. They are made to believe that sport is for the stronger and competent, thus making it a male enterprise.

Furthermore, in Zimbabwe like in most African cultural traditions, patriarchal notions of femininity stress that at marriage, a girl should be a virgin, a requirement not enforced for the boy. There is a general belief that engagement in sport can cause a girl to lose her virginity. The loss of one's virginity is a source of disgrace for the family, humiliation for the girl and can even lead to divorce. Despite the fact that this has not been proved scientifically, a lot of girls desist from participation in sport out of fear of the consequences later in life if it so happens that they lose their virginity.

In Zimbabwe, the majority of women do not have a formal voice in family affairs. They do not contribute to decisions made in the family. In fact, they are encouraged to learn in silence, making them receivers of information and not initiators. Men make themselves spokespersons for women (Nasimiyu-Wasike 2006:111). In Zimbabwe, this absurd scenario has found its way into most sport organisations which apparently are led by men who make decisions on behalf of women. The implication is that women do not know what is good for them; that they are not able to chart the course which their lives should take in as far as sport is concerned and therefore men can do that on their behalf. In instances where women make it to the top of sport organizations, they are often stigmatized and the general belief is that they would have done it 'riding' on men's backs or would have engaged in sexual activities with powerful men in society. A good example is that of Henrietta Rushwaya, the current Zimbabwe Football Association Chief Executive Officer. Both men and women in their office corridors discuss how unusual it is for a woman to lead an organisation which deals with men's sport. The major point is she should have engaged herself in sexual activities with powerful men in sport administration and politics for her to be where she is. Nothing of this sort is said if it is a man who has a similar job. On Wednesday 7 October, 2009, the *Zimbabwe Herald* reported that Abigail Munikwa who was working as a physiotherapist for Dynamos Football Club had been fired (p14). She was being blamed for the poor performance of the team because of her being a woman. The same report revealed that Henrietta Rushwaya was denied entry into the field of play at Rufaro Stadium when Dynamos was playing Zamalek of Egypt in 2008. For the male journalists who wrote the story, this was just a question of superstition. The report did not pay particular attention to the ill-treatment and humiliation of Munikwa irrespective of the fact that she was told about the decision to fire her when she was about to check into a hotel for official duty for the club. When asked to comment, this is what Munikwa said:

...what really hurt me was the way I was treated...being told just before I checked into the hotel that I had to go back home, that is very humiliating, Abigail Munikwa (in the *Zimbabwe Herald*, 7 October 2009, p14)

Unfortunately, it is this humiliation, psychological and at times physical and sexual abuse, that women encounter in sporting arenas and sporting organisations that cause them to stay within the confines of the socially constructed spaces for women.

'Safe' Spaces, Public Spaces and Women Participation in Sport

The concept of spaces is not new when one is dealing with African societies. It is incontestable that in African societies, women have their physical mobility controlled by men. The view of certain places as decadent and mortifying still persists, particularly in the Zimbabwean society. Hence, society continues to create moral spaces which are usually described as safe for women. Sport arenas, 'regrettably' for women, fall within the category of those public places which are viewed as unsafe and immoral. These restrictions on mobility and a perceived lack of security for women signify that women and girls in Zimbabwe have fewer opportunities to learn, play, socialize or participate in sporting activities.

Furthermore, in Zimbabwean Shona culture, it is a taboo for women to publicly show their excitement. An ideal woman is supposed to control her emotions. Women who show that they are excited in public places are ridiculed, resented and even isolated. In Shona society such women are often referred to as *nzenzu* meaning loose women. The issue of excitement is what characterizes sport, whether one is a participant or a spectator. Sport participants become hilarious when they are successful in events while spectators become very excited if their favourite teams or sportspersons win. The imposition of these norms regarding women's emotional expression makes women lose interest in sporting activities, either as participants or spectators.

Sport in Zimbabwe is sometimes characterized by violence; violence which can be caused by animosity between fans of different teams as well as ethnic tension. Chitando (2008:10) notes that, 'events like soccer matches between the Harare-based Dynamos and Bulawayo-based Highlanders are sometimes used to fan ethnic loyalties' (Chitando 2008:10). Zimbabwe has witnessed deaths which are a result of the violence which erupts at sports venues and in most cases women become the victims. Cultural perceptions are that if anything goes wrong in the sporting arena, for example, if violence erupts and the woman gets hurt; or even in any way the woman is abused; the woman is to blame. Many questions are asked like: Why did you go there? Is that a place for a woman to go? Don't you see you have yourself to blame because you had gone into men's territory?

Such intimidating and accusatory questions and statements discourage women from participating in sport.

The reference to sports arenas as men's domain terrifies women who resultantly coil and confine themselves to the socially constructed 'women's' domains. It is therefore not surprising that even women who are economically empowered subscribe to the notion of safe spaces. These notions have been entrenched by socialization to the extent that older women monitor the movements of young girls and often discourage them from entering those places that are culturally designated as men's territory. In this regard, the internalization of notions of femininity leads Zimbabwean women to perpetuate the oppression of their kind. After asking Marcia Madondo (15 years) the reasons why she had not gone to watch professional sport in her lifetime, she replied;

Because I am a girl I am not released into those places easily. My mother always tells me that if I stay at home I am able to protect my girlhood rather than go out and expose myself to male predators (Interview with Marcia Madondo in Harare, 29 September 2009).

Interestingly, Marcia's father takes her brother with him to soccer matches. Olajubu (2003:10) says 'the private domain, i.e. domesticity and motherhood, seems to be the space of women in most cultures'. There is some privacy that is associated with the home which women are expected to espouse. The centre of the home in Zimbabwean society is the epitome of respect and protection; it is conceived as the place where women are 'safeguarded'. The home has always been and continues to be seen as the women's domain. This is even expressed in some of the Shona sayings like '*musha mukadzzi*' (for a home to be called a home there should be a woman). The home, culturally, is synonymous with morality, dignity, respect, etc. These are also seen as the tenets of an ideal woman. Thus, the home and the woman become compatible. Most respondents in this research highlighted that if women want to participate in sport they should be accompanied by men who are close to them for guaranteed protection; yet others suggested that the presence of men should be seen as a moral check and balance since women are 'known' to lose control when they are in public. In other words, once in public, women are regarded as being capable of behaving irresponsibly. It should, however be noted that the cultural portrayal of the home as safe for women is not always true. While it is acknowledged that women at times encounter violence in public spaces, much of the violence against women in Zimbabwe takes place in the home which led Women's Organisations to lobby for the enactment of the Domestic Violence Act which came into effect in October 2007. This, however, is beyond the scope of this research.

Gender inequality is entrenched in socio-religious institutions. Religious institutions reinforce societal attitudes towards women by emphasizing issues of masculinity and femininity. These attitudes are blind to the fact that:

- Gender equality and women's empowerment are essential for poverty elimination and sustainable development at personal, national and continental level.
- The perpetuation of discriminatory cultural beliefs in Zimbabwe deters women and girls from participating in the socio-economic development of the country.

Religious institutions tend to be insensitive, thus exacerbating the plight of women in as far as sport is concerned. Commenting on women and sport in (Islamic) Yemen, the Yemen Observer Staff in an article entitled: *New Report Exposes Obstacles to Women's Sport* reports that 'women's involvement in sports has faced several obstacles ranging from social, physical, personal and religious hindrances' (<http://www.yobserver.com/reports/10014527.html> [webpage]). The participation of women in sport is thought to be against certain religious norms. For example, Christianity which commands a large following in Zimbabwe actually reinforces African Indigenous Religion(s) expectations on women to stay at home. The Bible in Ephesians 5:22 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 reiterates that women should submit to their husbands and that they should not be involved in public discourses. Paul in 1 Corinthians actually underscores the home as the only place where women are supposed to ask questions pertaining to issues they do not understand even if these issues have to do with what is happening outside of the home (the public sphere). What is implied in Paul's letter to the Corinthians is that men have all the answers to that which women do not understand, thus ruling out any possibility of equality between men and women. Whenever relations between men and women are discussed in churches, these scriptures are emphasized. For example, after an address by the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers' Association on the need to treat women as equals with men, male members of the Johanne Marange Apostolic sect rejected these claims of equality. (*The Zimbabwean*, 14 January 2010, p5) One of the male members put it thus, 'As community and church leaders from the *mapositori* sect, we do not accept that at all. How can we (men) be equal with women? It is there in the Bible that women will always be under men'. (*The Zimbabwean*, 14 January 2010, p5) A professor from the University of Zimbabwe said 95% of the men who are violent against women especially in the home confess that they find justification in the Bible (Interview with a University of Zimbabwe Professor who preferred to remain anonymous, 9 December 2009).

Apart from the home; the church is another socially constructed 'safe' space for women in Zimbabwe. The church as an institution prescribes what women should wear. Sport clothing has been a constant area of controversy and resistance to women's participation in sport. (*The Zimbabwean*, 14 January 2010, p5) More often, sports attire is criticised for exposing women's bodies something that is deemed provocative to the sexual feelings of men. This is true of mainline churches and African initiated churches in Zimbabwe. This perception discourages potential and talented women and girls from getting into the sports field and participate. Tariro Mawoyo, one of the female interviewees for this research cited sports uniforms that make her look like a man as a major restriction to her participation in sport as a sportsperson because it is at variance with her church's doctrine on women's clothing (Interview with Tariro Mawoyo in Harare, 5 October 2009). In most cases, when men are going to watch sport or participate as sportspersons on Saturdays and Sundays, women find themselves either at home or in church buildings.

A lot of women who have dared challenge the status quo have been accused of prostitution or of negligence of their primary role as mothers and housewives. After asking one of my interviewees how she viewed women who go and watch sports, she said, 'I don't think women who go and watch sports are married. My instincts just tell me that these are single women who are after other people's husbands' (Interview with a female interviewee in Harare, 7 October 2007). This view was supported by yet another male interviewee who retorted:

I would never allow my wife to go to a stadium. Why would she desire to frequent men's places if she doesn't have ulterior motives? *Anenge achida kuonekwa nani?* (Whose attention does she want to attract?). If we all go to watch sports, who is going to look after the children and make sure they are well fed? Interview with a male (Interview with a male interviewee in Harare, 7 October 2009).

These attitudes are reflective of how women who break out into public spaces such as sporting arenas are viewed. They are always thought to have clandestine intentions. For instance, they are thought to be seeking men's attention. Most men give this as a justification for the verbal as well as the sexual abuses encountered by women at sport venues, whether they are participants or spectators. As a result, most married men feel that their wives and daughters are more protected from other men when they stay at home than being in public places, sporting arenas included. It should be noted however, that public spaces are not always dangerous to women. Public spaces such as stadia only become dangerous when some men use violence to impose and enforce women's place, that is, both the physical space women inhabit and the psychological and social space by which women are culturally defined.

It is therefore not surprising that there are some men and parents who have not positively encouraged the participation of women in sport. Men whose daughters and wives attend sports events either as sportspersons or spectators have complained of being stigmatized in their various communities. They are often labeled as living under a 'petticoat government' implying that women are in total control of their households.

Furthermore, a lot of negative attributes have been attached to sport. Sport is thought to have adverse effects on women's reproductive health and it has been blamed for giving women masculine characteristics. One of my respondents put it thus; '*Masports anondipa mhasuru dzinenge dzevarume. Zvinonetsa kana ndave kuda kuita mwana*' (Sport causes me to develop muscles like those of men. It will cause me problems when I want to have a child) (Interview with a female interviewee in Harare, 9 October 2009). Therefore, issues of the politics of the female body come into play. Staying away from sporting activities becomes very important for African women who may suffer from social exclusion if their bodies are viewed as masculine. However, while sport is viewed as a threat to women's health, it does exactly the opposite to men - it builds their bodies. Men who go to watch sport get the opportunity to relax; for a moment they are able to forget the pressures of work and family commitments; a chance which women are not afforded.

Women, Sport and Development

In 2004, the third IOC World Conference on Women and Sport was held in Morocco under the theme 'Sport as a Vehicle for Social Change'. This was after the recognition that women's participation in sport is a fundamental condition for achieving sustainable development. In November 2003, Resolution 58/5 of the United Nations challenged governments to make use of sport as a means to promote education, health, development and peace. (United Nations Report 2003) However, in Zimbabwe, processes of policy formulation and policy implementation continue to hinder the full participation of women in sport. Most policies remain on paper, but they do not make any positive impression on the social realities on the ground. Lilian Mhuru (on-going research) notes that policies and actions that do not address gender disparities miss critical development opportunities (Mhuru 1996). She also highlights the fact that discriminatory practices and public attitudes towards the advancement of women and gender equality have not changed at the same pace as policy; legal and institutional frameworks (ibid).

The public space continues to be the preserve of men in Zimbabwe. As mentioned earlier, sport falls within the public space and it has presented a lot of opportunities for men. For example, Peter Ndhlovu (Soccer) was the first Zimbabwean to play in a British soccer club; Andy Flower (Cricket) was once voted

the best batsmen in the world and currently the technical director of the British cricket team; Nick Price (Golf) was at one point the world number one golfer; Tendai Chimusasa (Marathon), etc. On the other hand, women who have made it in sport have been confined to marathon (Samukeliso Moyo and Faith Kamangila) and swimming (Kirsty Coventry). While a student at Kuwadzana 1 High School in Harare, Faith represented Zimbabwe at a number of international athletics competitions. Currently, she is studying in the United States of America after receiving sponsorship due to her sporting talent. Women who have risen to the top in sport are very few in Zimbabwe compared to their male counterparts. A lot of Zimbabwean sportsmen are owners of beautiful properties in affluent suburbs, have fleets of cars, among others. Because of the networks established as they meet in the sports meetings, they easily establish their own businesses. Development for these men is taking place at a personal level. The nation benefits from this development because these men not only helped in flying high the national flag, but also create employment and business opportunities.

The same cannot be said of the majority of women in Zimbabwe. They have continued to be spectators as men thrive in the sporting arena. The development of sport, in the country has not paid particular notice to women's participation in sport, both as sportspersons and as spectators. Sport administrators appear not to be bothered by the fewer women who are actively involved in sport. In Zimbabwe, women constitute 52 per cent of the population against men's 48 per cent (UNESCO Report 2000). This therefore means that there is a lot of untapped sporting talent among the female population in the country. As a result, the nation loses out on potential revenue which is important for development. An interview with a sports administrator revealed that if the sporting talents of women are carefully tapped, the nation is bound to develop in so many ways than ever imagined (Interview with a sports administrator in Harare, 12 October 2009).

Zimbabwe as a nation currently faces a number of challenges, namely economic decline, political conflict, high levels of poverty, and HIV and AIDS. The impact that these challenges have on women is greater than they have on men because the former have limited access to the means of the economy as well as to decision-making bodies. Gupta (cited in Dube 2003) notes very well that women have restricted access to productive resources outside the home as well as decision-making power; and that women have less control over resources than men. Therefore, the participation of women in sport becomes paramount in that it opens those doors which society has traditionally shut on women. Women's increased involvement in sport can promote positive development by providing alternative norms, values, attitudes, knowledge, capabilities and experiences (United Nations Report, *op cit*). Women as sportspersons can manage to generate their

own incomes which means they cease to continue being economically dependent on men. Consequently, sport for women becomes a vehicle for poverty eradication.

In addition, sport can bring women the physical, psychological, and social well-being that they have lacked for generations (<http://www.sportdevelopment.org/docs/uploads/gender%20Equity%20in%20sport%20lessons%20learned.pdf> [webpage]). As audiences and sportspersons, sport creates for women in Zimbabwe platforms for social networking (United Nations Report, op cit). Women are afforded the opportunity to discuss issues that directly affect them; issues that have to do with domestic violence and HIV and AIDS. This was the view of one of my interviewees who said, 'I think if I am allowed to go and watch sport I will be able to find friends who will then help me solve my life's problems' (Interview with Zvikomborero Mwaruta in Harare, 9 October 2009). The Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey reveal that women constitute 54 per cent of people living with HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe and HIV prevalence is higher among females aged 15-49 years at 21.1 per cent as compared to the 14.5 per cent of males. The BBC once carried a report on 16 women's teams in Harare that were taking part in competitions for players who had declared that they were HIV positive. (Vickers, 2009 (no exact date was given on this web article). One of the teams, ARV Swallows' goalkeeper, Thandiwe Richard told the BBC reporter that she wanted the whole world to know about her HIV status so that others could be helped (op cit). In terms of how she had benefited from being involved in sport, she said, '...football has helped my fitness, I can't say I'm ill now, but I wasn't well when I joined'(op cit). Sport in this case is seen as opening the channels of communication with other women outside of one's household thereby learning from their experiences. Women can discuss how they are affected by HIV and AIDS and give each other ideas on how they can best protect themselves. Sport in this instance becomes a tool for spreading the much needed awareness on HIV and AIDS issues. Women cannot receive this information if they continue to be confined to the home.

By offering sports activities to girls and women, they get a chance to develop and increase their self-confidence (<http://www.sportdevelopment.org/docs/uploads/gender%20Equity%20in%20sport%20lessons%20learned.pdf> [webpage]).

Most female respondents expressed their desire to become sport celebrities and have their sporting talents celebrated across the globe. From their perspective, this would greatly boost their social standing as women and greatly reduce incidences of sexual as well as physical abuse against women and girls. Self-confidence would encourage them to stand up and defend themselves against physical assault and sexual harassment in the home as well as in public spaces. Sport in this case can be used to challenge gender-based violence.

The post-election violence that occurred in Zimbabwe during the period from March to June 2008 saw members of the same community turn against one another. Quite a number of women and girls were raped and some even died due to politically motivated causes. Some women perpetrated this violence against their female counter-parts. If sport can be introduced to women in these communities and women fully participate, both as players and spectators, sport can then contribute its part in the process of national healing and 'can help bridge the divide and promote the core values necessary for lasting peace' (8/9 <http://www.fifa.com/aboutfifa/worldwideprograms/news/newsid=94202.html> [webpage]). As they play in the sports field, political agendas are suspended and this can create a safe environment that enables women and girls to express their feelings and where traumatized women learn to integrate their experience of pain and fear (op cit). Where sport can teach people in affected communities that though they belong to different teams (political parties) they are not necessarily enemies but simply competitors. People would learn to accept defeat with dignity. Thus, sport becomes an important tool in the fulfillment of the national peace agenda.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the notion of safe spaces continues to obstruct women participation in sport in Zimbabwe. It also shows that other factors such as gender roles, sports attire, and notions of femininity impacts negatively on women's active participation in sport either as sportspersons or spectators. Majority of women who participated in this study felt that despite socio-cultural hindrances to their participation in sport, sport has the potential of uplifting them socio-economically. Sport can create platforms for women to make friends and share information on topical issues such as HIV and AIDS as well as domestic violence. The physical benefits from sports equip women and girls with skills to defend themselves against physical and sexual violence which will contribute towards the reduction of the spread of HIV and AIDS infections. Sport can also be a very important component in the national healing process currently under way in Zimbabwe. Thus, there is need to demystify the domestic space as a woman's sphere of influence. Such demystification would help women who break out of their socially constructed 'safe spaces' into the public sphere deal without feelings of guilt and shame or fear of stigmatization. There is also a need for paradigm shift in the way families socialize their children. Children need to be accorded equal sporting opportunities, regardless of their sex.

Notes

1. *Nbodo* is a game usually played by young Zimbabwean girls especially in the rural areas using pebbles and *dunhu* is a ball game that is also common with young Zimbabwean girls either in the rural areas or in towns

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