

# Afro-Pessimism and Negative Reporting on South Africa During the 2010 FIFA World Cup

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## Abstract

How the media portray Africa and the African news or stories has for long been viewed with disdain and dislike by the native Africans who feel that they are unfairly presented by the western media. Therefore, to better understand these portrayals, this study evaluated five online newspapers in the United Kingdom (UK) that covered the World Cup event in South Africa. Results show that UK media framing of Africa tends to be heavily skewed at portraying Africa in a negative light. The media therefore, should ensure that framing of African reportage is divorced from the tendency of viewing Africa with negative lens. This will consequently culminate into reporting about Africa in a fair and balanced manner.

**Keywords:** Media, Framing, News, Africa, South Africa, World Cup

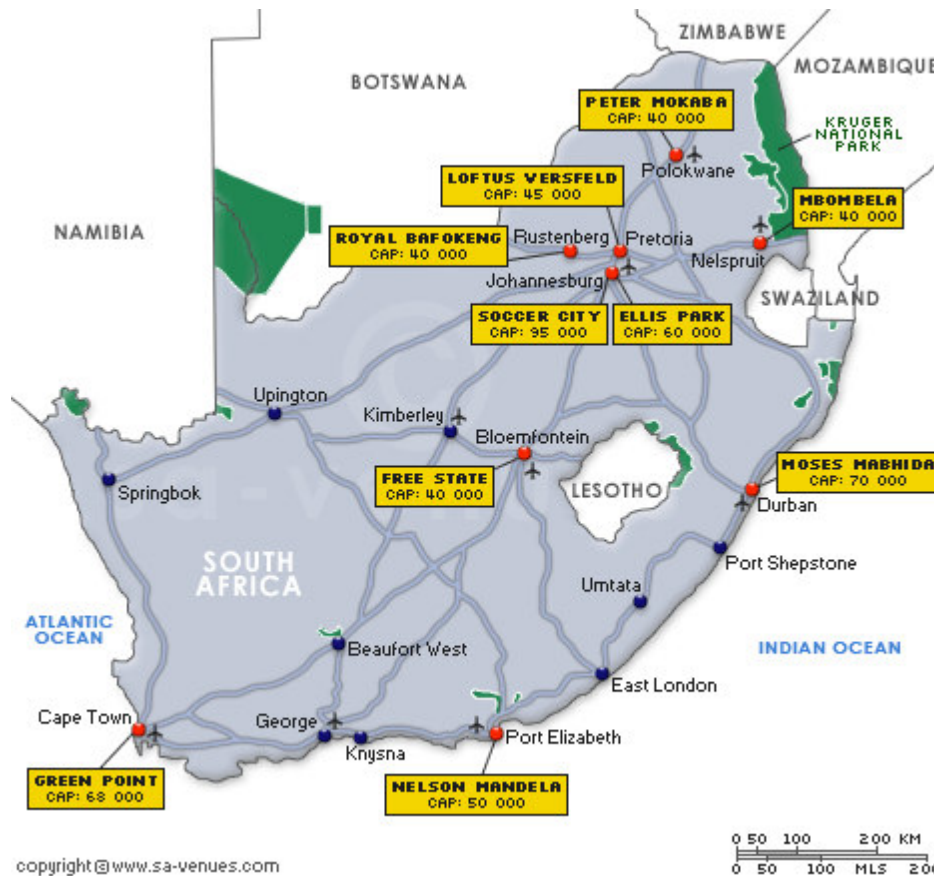
## Background information

The FIFA World Cup is the world's largest sporting and media event. FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association) has more member nations than both the International Olympic Committee and the United Nations. It is the world championship for men's national association football teams from the whole world of football.

The FIFA 2010 Football World Cup was hosted by South Africa and it was the first World Cup to be held on an African soil. It presented a historic opportunity to import the World Cup to areas on the periphery of the world football and to further broaden cultural, political, and socio-economic base of the game. The 2010 World Cup hosted in Africa was therefore, illustrative of a growing trend in international governance of football to expand the game outwards from its traditional power bases (Europe and South America) in an attempt to further globalize the sport.

Prior to winning the rights to showcase this grand event, South Africa had to participate in a bidding process. That process was only open to African nations and after seeing off competition from Egypt and Morocco, South Africa was in May 2004 awarded host country status for FIFA 2010 World Cup. That was unprecedented and it came following radical changes by the governing body in the way the competition was run. After selecting Germany to host the tournament in 2006, FIFA decided to leave behind the tradition of alternating between European and Latin American venues. Instead, it was agreed that competition would rotate on the basis of the next host country being selected from within a confederation's members as the event moved from confederation to confederation around the world on an equal basis. FIFA has six global federations namely; Confederation Africaine de Football (CAF), Confederation of North, Central American and the Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF), Asian Football Confederation (AFC), Oceania Football Confederation (OFC), Confederacion Sudamericana de Futbol (CSF) and the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA).

As has already been alluded to, the 2010 FIFA World Cup tournament took place in South Africa and a total of sixty four matches were played over a period of twenty five days from 11 June to 11 July 2010 in the nine host cities. *Bafana Bafana* (South African Football Team) opened the tournament against a young Mexico side in a game that ended in 1-1 draw. After rounds of exciting matches, in the final, Spain, the European champions defeated third-time finalists the Netherlands 1-0 after extra time with Andres Iniesta's goal in the 116th minute giving Spain their first world title, the first time that a European nation has won the tournament outside its home continent. Germany finished on third place and the fourth place went to Uruguay. The map below shows the nine host cities that show cased this historic event.



**Figure 1** Map of South Africa showing the nine host cities and stadium names

Prior to the tournament there was a lot of pessimism and negative reporting by the Western media who doubted the capability of an African country to host such a gigantic sporting event. However, against all odds South Africa hosted one of the most successful World Cups in recent times.

The question of media bias is well documented and in this modern day of technology advancement one would be tempted to believe that negative reporting and bias are things of the past. However, as literature shows, the media are still biased against and towards some people, nationalities and places just but to mention a few. Of particular interest is the way the Western media reports about Africa. Mostly, unpalatable adjectives have been used to describe Africa and in the run up to the FIFA 2010 World Cup hosted by South Africa, the Western media was awash with negative reporting about the capability of an African country to host such a prestigious tournament. Against this background, this study sought to examine whether the Western media really carried stories that negatively reported about South Africa. For convenience sake, the study primarily focused on the English press.

### Research questions

This study attempted to answer the following questions;

- Do the Western media report about Africa in a fair and balanced manner?
- If there is indeed bias and negative reporting what can be done to change the status quo?

### Review of literature

Africa is the second largest continent both in terms of land area and population, but it is the poorest and least developed of all the continents. Many people in the Western World generally display a significant lack of knowledge about Africa. As Michisa (2002) notes, most of these people have never visited Africa and most of them never will. "Yet in their minds, most of them have certain images of Africa that they hold to be 'true' or 'real'. They possess these images courtesy of the Western Media through its misrepresentations of Africa- via television programs and documentaries, the movie industry, the Internet as well as the print media including the newspapers, magazines, journals and books" (p.1).

South Africa hosted the FIFA World Cup from 11 June to 11 July 2010. Prior to kick off, a lot of negative publicity was unleashed from all angles particularly from the Western media who vehemently stated that South Africa was not ready to host such a great football event and that if she was allowed to host, the games would be a

total disaster. All that just epitomizes the negative image and perception that the West have over Africa which in true sense does not reflect a true picture on the ground.

News is the timely, concise and accurate report of an event. Media workers are always reminded about the need to be objective in their stories. As Charnley (1959) contends, “objectivity in news is one of the dominant principles of modern journalism. Objectivity means that the news comes to the consumers untainted by any personal bias or any outside influence that would make it appear anything but what it is” (p.9). What this means is that the reporter should be impartial and exercise honesty as far as possible. Despite this, the Western media choose to do the contrary and write about Africa in a subjective manner a thing that consequently yields misinformation of their audience.

According to Michisa (2002), misinformation about Africa has become a growth industry in the west. “The popular images of Africa in the west include the “the dark continent” characterized by primeval irrationality, tribal wars, political instability, flagrant corruption, incompetent leadership and managerial ineptitude, hunger, famine and starvation as well as rampant diseases especially AIDS” (Machisa, 2002, p.1). In most cases Africa is exemplified as a homogenous entity comprising of uncivilized and heathen peoples who are culturally, politically and technically backward or inferior, who are incapable of governing themselves, or at least embracing democratic principles. Not only is the African continent depicted as the “dependent Africa” but also as “crisis driven Africa” without any hope of emerging out of its problems. Without exception, the images of Africa have been negative and sensationalize the dark side of Africa. (Michisa, 2002)

In all fairness, there are many positive developments in Africa but unfortunately these are not covered by the international media and that was actually the case with South Africa since only negative stories were targeted. It is nature of journalism, and in this case, nature of the Western media to focus on the unusual. According to Emenyeonu (1992), “the negative image of Africa is more graphically painted in the high-profile areas of political stability, democratic governance and economic development. But even in these, areas, there are many significant achievements which the international media have deliberately overlooked” (p.110).

Noting this biased reporting, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in a bid to promote equality among people from different cultural backgrounds, instituted a commission to look into how the international media operate. This led to the publication of the McBride Report- *Many Voices One World*. According to this report:

Distortion of news...occurs when inaccuracies or untruths replace authentic facts; or when a slanted interpretation is woven into news report... through the use of pejorative adjectives and stereotypes....

This occurs where events of no importance are given prominence and when the superficial or irrelevant are interwoven with facts of real significance (MacBride Report, 1980, pp157-158).

The report did cite some examples of such unfair reporting and the sort of language that was used. However, as Ojo (2001), observed, the situation does not show any signs of abating. He contends that “in spite of glaring fact/evidence, the Western media have not deviated from their distortion of news and “use of pejorative adjectives and stereotypes” two decades after MacBride Report was published. In its May 13<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> 2000 edition, the UK based influential magazine, the *Economist*, went as far as referring to Africa as “the hopeless continent” in its main front cover” (p.6).

When construction work was underway and other preparatory works were in progress. The Western media picked on negative stories which were solely aimed at painting a negative picture about South Africa and thereby create the impression that it was not ready to host the 2010 FIFA World Cup. In this age of modern technology one wonders why the West do not use this to objectively report about Africa. Okigbo (1995), notes that “the latest advances in technology have not changed the situation in favor of Africa. Rather they now make it easier and faster to collect, process, and distribute information that is injurious to the image of African nations and thus refuel the feelings of African underdevelopment...” (p.112). This should surely change and the Western media should learn to adhere to objectivity principles and report about Africa in a fair and objective manner. Unless this changes, the western public will continue having stereotypes or generalizations about what Africa is all about.

### **Study Design**

The study was a descriptive qualitative study that analyzed text from five English newspapers.

### **Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

In this study five English online newspapers (the BBC {British Broadcasting Cooperation} News, the Sun, the Guardian, the Daily Mirror and the Daily Mail) were analyzed to see how they reported about South Africa during the time when construction work of stadiums and other infrastructures was in progress and also during the time the matches were being played. And because South Africa was to host a sporting activity, only stories about the World Cup were sampled. These newspapers were chosen using random sampling technique and England was especially chosen because the English were once colonial masters of South Africans, as such they have profound knowledge of South Africa.

## Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was conducted to generate an understanding of how newspapers reported about South Africa in the wake of its intention to host the world cup. This was done by analyzing all articles that carried issues about the world cup in South Africa. Particular focus was paid on the descriptors that reporters used to refer to the state of affairs in South Africa and the readiness to host the mega event.

## Results

### Sample Characteristics

Content from five UK newspapers (N=5) were analyzed on how they reported about the world cup in South Africa. This has been summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1 Sample Characteristics**

Newspaper Name	Total Number of Articles	Percentage
BBC	10	30.3
The Sun	6	18.2
The Guardian	4	12.1
Daily Mirror	8	24.2
Daily Mail	5	15.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Language Use

After analyzing the data manually and qualitatively, it was established that some newspapers in the UK used negative language when reporting about issues that were happening in South Africa. Table 2 presents a summary of how the newspapers portrayed news about South Africa.

**Table 2 Language used by the UK newspapers**

Problem cited	Language used
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relies on <b>privately owned minibuses</b>, anticipated fleet upgrade <b>only</b> starting now.</li> <li>Gautrain will <b>only</b> be completed by 2010, will go <b>nowhere near any of the stadiums</b>.</li> </ul>
Stadium row	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stadium work got off at a <b>faltering</b> start, needs of the <b>poor</b> should come before <b>expensive</b> stadiums, Cape Town Stadium site met with <b>stiff resistance</b> from local residents and members of golf club.</li> <li>South Africa has one of the world's <b>worst</b> crime rates, with a murder <b>every 25 minutes</b> and <b>crystal meth epidemic</b>.</li> <li>Cape Town <b>brutal</b> street culture.</li> <li>Authorities are <b>desperately playing down</b> the scale of gang violence as the nation prepares to host the world's biggest sporting event.</li> </ul>
Crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Rape</b> is so common, recent study revealed that <b>one in four</b> South African men have committed sexual violence against women.</li> </ul>

### Discussion of findings

From the onset, it was hypothesized that the Western media are biased against Africa and that they normally carry negative stories about African countries. This hypothesis was almost confirmed the moment I started analyzing the *BBC News*. In its story of 7 July 2006, Mohammed Allie starts with a story entitled *South Africa's 2010 Challenge*. The story was written at a time when the World Cup was to be handed to South Africa. By that

time there were roughly four years before South Africa could host the World Cup but the writer seems to talk as if the tournament is kicking off tomorrow and that the problems he cites will not be addressed in due course.

Before the handover ceremony was about to take place in Germany, the UK media painted a gloomy picture about transport infrastructure in South Africa by indicating that “South Africa relies on privately owned minibuses and that the anticipated fleet upgrade was only starting now”. The writer further said “Gautrain will only be completed by 2010 and will go nowhere near any of the stadiums”. That was almost four years to the World Cup but if one looks at words like ‘only’ as used in the story, it may seem as if South Africa will not be able to finish the job. Such has been the pessimism of the Western media when African countries are doing something. Interestingly, the writer of this story is an African resident in South Africa and therefore one wonders whether he has been brainwashed by the western principles by virtue of working at *BBC*. On the Stadium Row, it is interesting to note that instead of writing some positives about the 67 000 stadium that will be built in Cape Town, emphasis has been placed on the row that has ensured between the Local Organizing Committee and the local residents plus members of the golf club. Again such is a feature of the Western media to overlook the positives and exaggerate the negatives. A 67 000 seater stadium is no mean achievement but the writer does not even comment on that.

Another story by the *BBC* carried the heading *How dangerous is South Africa?* This was written on 17<sup>th</sup> May 2010 and it focused on how dangerous South Africa was. It said South Africa is a place where violent crime happens. That much is hard to dispute. Each day nearly 50 people are murdered. The story went on to say that carjacking is a category of danger that would be novel to most visitors from the Western Europe. As it can be seen here, the story just dwells on the negatives. Of course it is true that crime rate is high in South Africa but the paper does not talk about all the efforts that have been made. The assertion that carjacking would be something strange to visitors from Western Europe begs the questions. Is the writer really sure that there are no cases of carjacking in Western Europe?

To echo the *BBC*, *The Sun* on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010 carried a story with a sensational heading *Welcome to Cape Fear*. Here the writer (Dan McDougall) tries to use a pun. Cape Town is labeled as Cape Fear in order to intensify the extent of crime rate in South Africa. Below is the language that was used in some sentence that the story contained in order to intensify fear in the audience:

- South Africa has one of the world’s worst crime rates, with a murder every 25 minutes and crystal meth epidemic.
- Cape Town brutal street culture.
- Authorities are desperately playing down the scale of gang violence as the nation prepares to host the world’s biggest sporting event.
- Rape is so common, recent study revealed that one in four South African men have committed sexual violence against women.

In unison with *The Sun*’s verdict, *The Guardian* also carried a similar story about South Africa’s insecurity. The paper starts by saying that giving the World Cup was a *dangerous option*. It goes on to talk about the crime rate issue which was also covered by both the *BBC* and *The Sun*. The paper also talks about the quality of driving in South Africa saying “*The standard of driving is variable and there are many fatal accidents*. By writing problems from different areas, the paper wants to show its audience about the extent of the South African problems and how dangerous it is to go there.

In addition, *The Daily Mail* of 10<sup>th</sup> September 2009 written by Aidan Hartley carried a story with a headline *South Africa World Cup 2010... and the shooting’s already started*. This story talks about the killings that are taking place at a farm 70 miles away from one of the World Cup stadiums. The farm killings and hosting the World Cup are in a way different cases but it is surprising why this isolated case is being presented as if it is the common occurrence in the whole of South Africa. The writer also attacks the police saying that they are letting criminals go scot free. Again this shows how the Western media reported about South Africa and exaggerated some cases in order to meet their objectives.

It is however, pleasant to note that the 2010 World Cup was hosted successfully by South Africa. Reports from different sources have confirmed that the tournament was a huge success and the *BBC* even changed its tone and in one story that it carried on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2010 just a couple of weeks before the commencement of the tournament. David Bond contended that having spent a number of days in South Africa he had noted that it was clear that South Africa was ready. The story goes on to say that the stadiums are so impressive and that the Gautrain has been built providing firm evidence of the impact the World Cup will have to the country. Despite this apparent success, *The Daily Mirror* was at it again asking whether it was worth spending \$5 billion dollars to host the tournament. It went on to say that as soon as the World Cup ends, the euphoria will end and that South Africa’s harsh problems will remain; poverty, unemployment, poor housing, unofficial segregation and deep inequality. All this was written amidst praises from different people that South Africa had hosted a successful World Cup.

### Limitations

The first limitation to this study is that it selected only five UK newspapers. This represents only a small portion of the UK media which means the study is unlikely to be representative of all the newspapers in the UK. The other limitation is that the study only concentrated on coverage of the world cup even between 2006 and 2010. Comparing portrayal of Africa from 2011 to-date, would have given a wider perspective of how the newspapers in the UK report about Africa. There is therefore, a need to conduct another study which will include data from 2006 to 2018.

### Conclusion

The study has confirmed the assertion that the Western media do not present Africa in a fair and objective manner. As has been observed, the images of Africa in the Western media are by and large images of misrepresentation. Whether this is a result of biased, unbalanced and subjective reporting, or is a consequence of a new way of reality where a few corporate giants are creating commercialized representation of Africa in order to maintain their businesses and ideological agendas is not the issue. The issue here, it seems, is these representations are always focused on the negative, the awkward, the weird and absurd. The fact remains, however, that these images are not all that Africa is about and moreover, some of those images are not unique to Africa. There are many places out there where people are starving, gripped by insecurity and face all sorts of problems that are synonymous with Africa. More importantly, as South Africa showed, Africa can do anything the western countries can do. By hosting a successful and historical World Cup, South Africa showed the west and the whole world at large the positive sides of Africa. Over and above, South Africa was vindicated because all along it had refuted all the exaggerations and allegations that were presented by the Western media to prevent it from hosting the World Cup in 2010. In view of this, the Western media need to change the way they report about Africa.

### Recommendations

Media personalities –especially reporters need to uphold professional ethics of journalism that call for the highest degree of objectivity, neutrality and balance reporting, even as they operate in the cut-throat atmosphere of the Western media.

The western public (audience) needs to be exposed first-hand to Africa and thereby reduce their dependence on misinformation of the media. In addition, African governments and journalists need to be vigilant and refute all misrepresentations of the Western media. They need to see to it that they produce a lot of correct information about the true Africa which can penetrate to all western audience.

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