Contemporary Journal of African Studies Vol. 9 No. 2 (2022), pp. 1–24

Playing for *oman* Ghana: Women's Football and Gendered Nationalism

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Abstract

Feminist scholars of nationalisms acknowledge the gendered character of national identity. Due to their association with heterosexual masculinity, national sports teams are one avenue through which gendered nationalisms manifest. Football (soccer) represents the peak of sporting masculinity and national identity around the world. Following the inaugural Women's World Cup in 1991, women's football continues to gain global popularity, raising questions about what new forms of nationalism can take root through this sport. Recent transnational feminist research has highlighted how, despite feminist resistance, patriarchal forms of gendered nationalism persist. Using the case of Ghanaian women's football, I examine how reactions to the national team shape and reveal understandings of gender and national identity. I find that whilst state institutions use their support of the women's team to shore up heteropatriarchal national identity, some spectators and fans discursively advocate for a recognition of women footballers as citizens and workers. These findings have implications for how activists and scholars engage the gendered construction of national identity.

Keywords: Gender, Nationalism, Sports, Football, Transnational feminism

Résumé

Les chercheurs féministes spécialistes des nationalismes reconnaissent le caractère genré de l'identité nationale. En raison de leur association avec la masculinité hétérosexuelle, les équipes sportives nationales constituent une voie par laquelle les nationalismes genrés se manifestent. Le football (soccer) représente le sommet de la masculinité sportive et de l'identité nationale dans le monde entier. Après la première Coupe du monde féminine

https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/contias.v9i2.1

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en 1991, le football féminin continue de gagner en popularité à travers le monde, soulevant des questions sur les nouvelles formes de nationalisme qui peuvent prendre racine dans ce sport. De récentes recherches féministes transnationales ont mis en évidence la persistance de formes patriarcales de nationalisme genré, malgré la résistance féministe. En utilisant le cas du football féminin ghanéen, nous examinons comment les réactions à l'équipe nationale façonnent et révèlent les compréhensions du genre et de l'identité nationale. Nous constatons que, tandis que les institutions étatiques utilisent leur soutien à l'équipe féminine pour consolider l'identité nationale hétéropatriarcale, certains spectateurs et supporters plaident discursivement pour une reconnaissance des footballeuses en tant que citoyennes et travailleuses. Ces résultats ont des implications sur la façon dont les activistes et les chercheurs s'engagent dans la construction genrée de l'identité nationale.

Mots clés: Genre, Nationalisme, Sports, Football, Féminisme Transnational.

Introduction

In 1991, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) announced the first Women's World Cup, sixty–one years after the inaugural global men's tournament, which was held in 1930. The inauguration of the women's sport was meaningful for a number of reasons, not least because it offered an opportunity for women to represent their nations through a sport unequivocally coded as masculine. The sport is not just a sport but a source of national identity formation and pride. Indeed, when sports are taken seriously as a site that engenders race, gender, and nationalism, meaningful insights about social structures, political resistance, and global politics can be attained (Carrington 2010). On the African continent, football has also been a way to develop pan–African solidarity (Darby 2002; 2013; Vidacs 2010). For example, Ghana's 1966 boycott of the FIFA men's World Cup led to a continental boycott in protest against FIFA's racist allocation of spots for African and Asian countries at the tournament. The protest highlighted global inequalities in the distribution of economic, geographic, and political opportunities, and resulted in refashioning how FIFA allocates places for the tournament. The inauguration of women's football and its growing popularity presents an opportunity for in–depth analysis of how national identity transforms via the women's game. As the most popular sport in the world, football represents an excellent avenue for such an analysis, whether at a grassroots level or on the global stage.

The following analysis revises transnational feminist understandings of the gendered nation by identifying a disconnect between inclusive popular nationalism as expressed through women's football, and the heteropatriarchal nationalism of the Ghanaian state. Using the case of women's football in Ghana, I argue that despite the seeming entrenchment of gendered nationalism, the popularity of women's football presents challenges to heteropatriarchal nationalism and the potential for new forms of nationalism to take root. Feminist scholars of nations and nationalism alert us to the fact that "all nationalisms are gendered" (McClintock 1995, 352). The gendering of nationalism means that women's incorporation into the nation typically reifies patriarchal hierarchies that subordinate women to men (Yuval–Davis 1993; Mohanty 2003; Puri 2004). In this hierarchy, heterosexuality is also privileged as the appropriate expression of national identity. As M. Jacqui Alexander reminds us, "no nationalism can survive without heterosexuality" (2005, 46). As such, to speak of gendered nationalism is, necessarily, to speak of heterosexuality. Despite the emergence of what Jasbir Puar (2007) has termed "homonationalism", which purports an

expansive inclusion into the national community, this inclusion is predicated on reifying gender and sexual norms whilst excluding racialized and poor people.

From previous scholarship, it is evident that the gendered nation persists. Yet, popular resistance to the gendered nation is also apparent. Through its unique focus on popular and quotidian articulations in conversation with official discourse, this study affirms transnational feminist theorizing about the gendered nation and directs attention towards grassroots and indigenous expressions of gender inclusive nationalism as observed through popular support for women's football. Football is traditionally a male-dominated sport. Consequently, for inclusive gendered nationalisms to emerge through this traditionally heteropatriarchal sport reveals the radical possibilities of this cultural form.

I rely on observations at the 2018 African women's football tournament hosted in Ghana, along with judgmental sampling of Ghana Football Association (FA) press releases, newspaper reports, and online commentaries about the Black Queens, Ghana's senior women's team. Specifically, I ask how Ghanaians' reactions to the women's national team shape and reveal understandings of gender and national identity? I begin by mapping out the literature on sport and gendered nationalism as an entry-point into understanding the place of women's football on the national landscape. My findings show how the women's game in Ghana is met with ambivalent forms of support and patronizing, particularly around players' inadequate fulfilment of feminine gender expectations and women's place as citizens. Citizenship is most simply understood as the relationship between the state and the people, or the rights that the state grants to different groups of people. In the following article, I use citizenship to refer to the state's relationship to women footballers as fully belonging within the nation. An example of equal citizenship in this context is the state's provision of equal and equitable resources to the women's team as what they offer to the men.

From my analysis, I argue that the position that Ghanaian women occupy in the nation-state delimits how the women's football team can serve as national representatives. Particularly, the team's occupation of a site coded as masculine raises concerns about the heterosexual and patriarchal credence of the nation. Nevertheless, the historical use of football as a source of national pride and the popularity of the women's sport troubles dominant state and popular narratives of the virulent masculine nation. As such, two competing outcomes emerge. First, the government, the Ghana FA, and the media position and deal with women's football in ways that reify the heteropatriarchal nation.

Secondly and concurrently, the FA and media, in response to fans and advocates, present the senior national women's team in ways that trouble the entrenchment of the heteropatriarchal nation. In so doing, these entities uplift popular sentiments that articulate gender expansive nationalism, thus offering up the potential for a renewed, more inclusive place for women within the nation.

Transnational feminist sociology and gendered nationalism

Transnational feminism offers an adequate theoretical framework for examining the relationship between postcolonial nation-building, the state, gender, sexuality, and women's football. This analytical lens engages the divergent interests of the nation-state with regard to questions of heterosexual patriarchy, transnational capitalism, postcolonialism, and locational politics (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Grewal and Kaplan 1994). My engagement with transnational feminism extends the lineage of transnational feminist sociology, which contends with gender-sexuality-state-nation as interlinked formations that reproduce, and maintain racialized gender and sexual hierarchies (Alexander 1994; Kim-Puri 2005; McClintock 1995; Puri 2004). However, I revise this theoretical framework to show how, while gender-sexuality-nation are indeed interlinked, popular interventions challenge the entrenchment of racialized gender and sexual hierarchies.

Transnational feminist sociology also emphasizes the need to "integrate empirical research that illustrates cultural/material meanings and relationships" (Kim-Puri 2005, 139). The theoretical insights and methodological tools of transnational feminist studies offer a generative means of understanding the nexus between sports, gender, sexuality, and state and popular articulations of national identity. Methodologically, this research develops by engaging multiple empirical sites that examine material, cultural, and discursive elements to draw conclusions about gender-sexuality-nation. A transnational feminist analysis offers a framework through which to assess the possibilities and implications of women footballers serving as national representatives. This theoretical framework, rooted in feminist decolonial politics, is a fruitful avenue through which to examine how women's football may both trouble and reify the existing shape of the gendered nation.

Gender, football, and Ghanaian national identity

From the inception of the Ghanaian nation, football has been an important aspect of the nation's identity. Indeed, in the introduction to The Ghana Reader, editors describe Ghana as being "known throughout the world by another commodity that shines – their national soccer team, the Black Stars" (Konadu and Campbell 2016, 1). In Ghana's case, the intentional ways the nation's first president deployed the sport as a tool to challenge colonial authority and then, later, as a way to rally Ghanaian national identity persists in the nation's sense of self (Darby 2013). The articulation of Ghanaian national identity through football has had the effect of affirming the nation's heterosexual masculinity.

In a foundational study of women's football on the African continent, political scientist Martha Saavedra (2003) showed how patriarchy within the global structure of football is replicated within African women's football organizing and development. Despite structural impediments to the development of the women's game, Saavedra found popular support for the sport, suggesting that claims of uniquely African cultural impediment to women's football were overstated. Indeed, scholars who examine women's football have found that regardless of geographical location, heteronormativity and homophobia characterize women's experiences of the sport (Adjepong 2020; Souza and Capraro 2020; Engh and Potgieter 2018; Ogunniyi 2014; Packer 2020; Grappendorf, Hancock, and Cintron 2019). Nonetheless, the gendered inequalities that characterize football has not stopped women from playing or procuring fans (Williams 2013; Dunn 2016). For example, in the Nigerian context, Onwumechili (2011) has shown a long history of the women's game since the 1930s, albeit perhaps as a kind of spectacle.

Given the relationship between football and national identity in Ghana, how do Ghanaians' reactions to women's football shape the understanding and expression of nationalism? In other words, what can we learn about gender and national identity when we take popular responses to women's football seriously?

Methods

This qualitative study employs a methodology situated in Black and African feminist epistemologies, which critically examine the material basis for Black women's subjugation (Clemons 2019; Collins 2009; Mama 2011). I rely on four streams of data in the discussion that follows. First, I conducted two weeks of observations at the African Women's Cup of Nations hosted in Ghana in November 2018.

These observations inform my analysis of the everyday expressions of nationalism as it is expressed through football. Second, I retrieved and analyzed over seventy-five (75) reports about the Black Queens from the Ghana Football Association's website, published between 2008 and 2020. Analysis of these reports informed my examination of how the FA as an institution, in close relationship with the Ghanaian state, discusses the Black Queens as national representatives. Third, I analyzed over one hundred (100) articles on GhanaWeb, an online archive of popular Ghanaian news sources. Media's role in associating sport with nationalism has been well-documented, and as such a media analysis provides insight into how the women's team is presented as national representatives. Fourth and finally, from the GhanaWeb articles, I identified articles that had at least five (5) comments from online users. This data source provided over sixty-five (65) pages of comments, which I examined systematically, for how commentators discuss the national team. Although there are limitations to analyzing online comments, the medium is a good way to assess divergent popular opinions (Steinmetz 2012; Robinson and Vidal-Ortiz 2013). From these diverse sources, I was able to consider how circulating cultural discourses via official and popular avenues and grounded material realities shape and transform the positioning of the Black Queens as Ghanaian national representatives.

My use of material, discursive, and observational data responds to Kim-Puri's (2005) call to critically engage both the discursive and the material in undertaking transnational feminist research. I introduce the methodological concept of a discursive terrain, which considers circulating cultural discourses via official and popular avenues, as well as the grounded material realities that shape and transform these discourses. This methodological intervention provides insights into the contentions, agreements, and amendments that shape the ways gendered nationalism manifests through women's football in Ghana. This approach will be generative for studying other sites where a perceived dominant narrative has taken hold, for example, the claim from sports institutions that transgender women are taking away from cisgender women's right to compete.

The discursive terrain on which this research takes place comprises four areas for analysis. First, I examine official national level narratives about the women's team as an instrument of nation-building. Second, I review media reports, which often align with the national discourse whilst also offering occasional challenges.

Third, I conduct analysis of popular responses via internet reactions to discourses as presented by the media. Fourth I engage in participant observation, which reports on how people live these discourses in everyday life. The various data streams provide important insights into the contentions, agreements, and amendments that shape the ways gendered nationalism manifests through women's football in Ghana. A benefit of attending to the contradictory elements embedded within this landscape is that moments of resistance to hegemonic discourse become more readily apparent.

For analysis, I input all retrieved data into Atlas.ti. My initial reading of the documents identified themes related to winning and losing, national pride, gender, sexuality, and the Black Queens as representing oman Ghana, that is, the Ghanaian nation. Using axial coding, I created relational catalogues of these themes, paying attention to whether they came from official narratives or online comments. For example, I identified relationships between codes for "players' social responsibility" and how the team was presented (via media and FA press releases) as "playing for the nation". These two levels of data analysis informed subsequent explanatory memos that structure the discussion below. I animated the documentary data analysis through my recorded field observations.

Findings

The two key findings discussed below indicate a productive tension between official statements and actions about the place of the women's football team in the national landscape, and how everyday people reacted to the team. Officially, the Black Queens primarily represented Ghana as women of the nation, and not as Ghanaians writ large. Yet, in the stands and online, spectators and fans revised this positionality to articulate the women's team as both unequivocal national representatives, and as mothers and caretakers of the masculine nation. The tension between popular and official discourses challenges the epistemic opposition between woman and citizen (Alexander 1994). We also see how formal organizations devalue women's labor, whilst within the popular sphere, some Ghanaians – men and women alike – fight for equitable pay for work done regardless of gender. This fight recognizes women's footballers as workers who deserve to be remunerated and celebrated as full citizens of the nation.

Playing for the nation's women

In 2018, Ghana hosted the African Women's Cup of Nations for the first time. From FA press releases and newspaper accounts, it was evident that officials and players alike understood hosting (and winning) the tournament to be a source of national pride. Comments from members of the local organizing committee, Ghana's FA, and players demonstrated this sense of pride and national service. For example, the chairperson of the local organizing committee declared Ghana's readiness to "pull off a big surprise by serving football lovers with the most exciting women's tournament in the history of the game in Africa" ("All set for kick-off in Accra"[1]). In a radio interview, midfielder Leticia Zipki announced the team's motivation to "make a name for ourselves and the country" ("Our target is to host and win"). In keeping with the idea that hosting and winning the tournament was important for the nation's identity and pride of place, officials and players requested broad national support from football fans.

The sense of national pride that came with playing for the country was a major theme across the various data sources. Yet my analysis reveals how each set of discourses responded to conflicting ideas about what it means for women to play for and represent the nation in football. Specifically, official narratives positioned women's football as representing women and not the nation generally. Consequently, although politicians, including officials from the Ministry of Youth and Sports and Ghana's First Lady, Rebecca Akuffo-Addo, deployed language reminiscent of Kwame Nkrumah's use of football to mobilize national identity and demonstrate patriotism, a gendered veneer overlaid this language. For example, the Minister of Youth and Sport, Isaac Asiamah told the team at a press conference, "This is your time to let us know that indeed, Ghana is ready to host the tournament, it is about women so please, we are waiting for you to go out there and market the game" ("Sports minister Isaac Asiamah rallies support for Black Queens"). For the minister, winning the tournament was the team's way of showing the country their gendered commitment to the nation.

The first lady's role as Ghana's ambassador for women's football helped to emphasize the message that the Black Queens were representing the nation's women and not the nation as a whole. Her involvement in the tournament preparation was reported by newspaper accounts as an extension of her support of women.

1 Titles for GhanaWeb articles are provided in quotes for reference.

When Akuffo-Addo hosted the local organizing committee at her office, the report described her "role in pioneering the construction of the maternity block at the Akomfo Anokye Teaching Hospital," and celebrated her various efforts in "ensuring that the lives of women and children are well taken care of" ("Ghana's first lady throws weight behind hosting 2018 AWCON"). From this reporting, we begin to see how women's football, by virtue of involving women, is wrapped up under women's reproductive capacities in society. As such, although the initial articulation of the tournament appears to be positioning women as both national representatives and patriots playing for national pride, official discourse upheld women's reproductive capacity as definitive of their value to the nation.

The tournament's opening ceremony reproduced the official position that women's football was a women's issue, rather than an issue of national interest or importance. The ceremony began with an announcement formally welcoming the First and Second Ladies of the Republic of Ghana over the loudspeakers. Whilst on the one hand, the president and vice-president's wives' presence suggested that women were to be centered over the next two weeks of the tournament, the absence of any male national representatives could also be read as disinterest. The announcer's descriptions of aspects of the opening ceremony highlighted the discursive positioning of Ghanaian women. On the field, men and women dancers wearing various Ghanaian traditional attire showed off cultural drumming and dancing from Ewe, Ga, Dagomba, Fante, and Asante nations of Ghana. Their outfits were loose-fitting and although gendered, muted in their differences. The dancers moved their bodies energetically, jumping up and down to the beat of the drums. "From tradition, we move to modernity", the loudspeakers boomed. Here, the drumming stopped, and the vigorous dancing was replaced with dainty movements as the women dancers' clothes got tighter and their sandaled feet were replaced with high-heeled shoes. The visual representation of modernity at the opening ceremony revealed an idea of modern women as physically constrained and unable to move as freely as they could under tradition. The master of ceremony then stepped onto the field and shouted into a microphone, dramatically describing the "spirit of African womanhood", to which he said he wanted to introduce the gathered spectators. "The fierceness, the power…, indomitable, unwavering, unbreakable spirit that has been the backbone of the continent", he declared. It was this version of African women who were going to play football over the next few weeks.

Although state officials and newspaper reports positioned women's football as an extension of women's reproductive place in society, popular responses to the tournament were more expansive. Analysis of internet comments and observations at the stadium sometimes challenged and at other times affirmed official discourse. For example, one commenter named Ekow Samuel often responded to articles on GhanaWeb to celebrate the women's team and oman Ghana, i.e., the Ghanaian nation. On an article about the women's national team winning the 2018 West African Football Union (WAFU) women's tournament, for example, Ekow Samuel wrote, "Very [big] congratulation[s]! good to you for the winning tournament of the cup of WAFU...., Black Queens of Ghana! You [are] making the nation Ghana [very] joyful [for] the winning victory. God bless you and oman Ghana, Ghana is all ways proud of you."[2] The comment from Ekow Samuel demonstrates one aspect of how fans experienced the women's team. For this commenter, the players winning the tournament was a source of pride for the nation and he celebrated the win by feting the Black Queens. Others, commenting with less frequency than Ekow Samuel, shared similar messages of pride and support for the women's national team. As the AWCON tournament approached, comments such as "Ghanaians are wishing you all the best for the upcoming tournaments. Die hard for our country Ghana [···]. #black queens for ghana#" from a commenter, Jagri Kwame Michael were prevalent under articles. Such comments demonstrate some level of investment in the women's team as national representatives who are playing football for the entire Ghanaian nation.

Whereas comments such as the above described the women's national team as unequivocally representing the Ghanaian nation and making Ghana proud, others responded to stories about the team by emphasizing that these were women representing the nation as women who, regardless of their position, were meant to take care of men's needs. Aboagye Tafo was one such commenter. Tafo's comments indicated that the women's national team players ought to embody what it means to be a good Ghanaian woman. On the same article mentioned above concerning the Black Queens victory at WAFU, Aboagye Tafo commented:

> Well done sugar them ladies. Don't be buying food from restaurants for your hubbies. Please. Copy Madam Joyce Aryee, Maame Dorkono (Grace Omaboe), Gifty Anti, Vim Lady Afia Pokuaa and the well nurtured ladies in society.

2 I revise internet comments for grammar and general readability. I also use online usernames as provided.

Naming women that they identified as the kind of women that the players should aspire to be, Aboagye Tafo's remarks are clearly not about football but rather serve as an opportunity to advance an agenda about the place of women in Ghanaian society. Comments such as Aboagye Tafo's are in keeping with the official discourse about women's football, which is that regardless of their football acumen, the players of the national women's team are Ghanaian women who must fulfill a preconceived role about women's place in society. That role is one that serves men's interests under heterosexual patriarchy. Moreover, by naming Sugar Dem Ladies, Aboagye Tafo reflected a larger social discourse in which women are complicit in reproducing the gendered inequalities of the landscape.

Sugar Dem is a women's group in Ghana that advocates treating men nicely, as a way to advance women's empowerment in society. The group, founded by radio host Afia Pokua, mentioned in the comment above, was created in response to an organization called Pepper Dem Ministries. Primarily operating on social media, Pepper Dem described their mission as taking advantage of public incidents to "highlight unfair judgements, mostly, [sic] placed on women in society". In so doing, the group aimed to "facilitate learning, unlearning and re-learning of the narratives both males and females have been operating by, in order to establish a better approach to our socialization" (Pepper Dem Ministries, Facebook). Whereas Pepper Dem's position is to challenge existing gender inequalities through a focus on the disproportionate burden of care work placed on Ghanaian women, Sugar Dem reacted to this critique by emphasizing that women "were born to support [men] not to compete for power. Our job is to see you happy and successful so that you will support us too" (Sugar Dem Gh Facebook post quoted in Hanson 2020, 104). In her master's thesis assessing social media and the proliferation of rape culture in Ghana, Nana Akosua Hanson points out how public responses to the two women's groups demonstrate the entrenched beliefs about women's social and cultural position as subordinated to men (Hanson 2020, 105). Due to their alignment with official narratives of women as men's caretakers and support systems, Sugar Dem has received public support through traditional media houses. By contrast, Pepper Dem is largely painted as a group of man-hating, bitter women ("Misandrists or feminist?").

The media's acceptance of Sugar Dem Ladies offers them leverage in advancing official positions about women's subordinated position in Ghanaian

society. In 2018, the group presented an award to the first woman to be appointed head coach to the Black Queens, former footballer Mercy Tagoe-Quarcoo after the team won the WAFU cup ("Queens Coach Mercy Tagoe honored by SugarDem Gh"). This award and its publicization demonstrates how formal power structures understand the position of women's football within the nation. Sugar Dem's politics, which advocates gender complementarity and emphasizes gender differences that sustain power inequalities embedded in heterosexual patriarchy, reproduces this official discourse. As such, the group's interest in women's football advances conservative gender ideologies around the sport and helps to maintain women's subordinated position within the Ghanaian body politic.

The powerful structures that sustain official discourse in Ghana maintain the women's football team as representative of Ghanaian women. As women, players are positioned as important only insofar as they support men and shore up heterosexual masculinity. This positioning is evident in the official narratives at the opening ceremony as well as FA, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and media discussions of the women's football team. However, there are low reverberations of pushback against such limited views of women as national representatives, and more broadly, women's place in the nation. This challenge can be seen in online comments that posit the women's team as standing in for all of oman Ghana.

Women versus men

Official discourses maintained that the women's national team represents the nation as women. Sometimes FA officials, media outlets, and fans asked players to perform better than the men's national team. These requests were typically framed as the women's team either doing what the men's team could not do (such as winning tournaments) or setting a positive example for the men's team. From official sources, comparisons to the men's teams were most often employed to dissuade the players on the women's national team from behaving like players on the men's team. Several articles reported officials encouraging players to play for "pride and love" of the nation, unlike the men, who apparently played for money. For example, receiving the women's national team as part of their nationwide tour in advance of the AWCON tournament, the omanhene (king) of Essikadu Traditional Council described the disgust he felt when the men's team threatened to strike during the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil on account of unpaid bonuses. "You ladies should prove that you are different from them", the omanhene was reported to have said ("Play for the pride, not money"). The men's team received as much as $130,000 per player

for their appearance at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil ("In Ghana's bags"). Yet they still experienced clashes with the Ghana FA about lack of payment. Nevertheless, it was the underpaid, under-resourced players on the women's team who were encouraged to put money aside and play for pride.

Media outlets also focused on the women's national team's demand for their rightful payment as a negative quality. Headlines such as "Black Queens pocketed over 12K each" and "Too much monetary focus was the bane of the Black Queens" emphasized that the players' desire to be paid for their work was inappropriate. Although reporting that members of the national team had unpaid bonuses dating as far back as 2014, one news article wondered if there was "too much focus on money" ("Black Queens pocketed over 12K each"). Such news reports followed up on a claim from Ghana's head of delegation for the AWCON tournament that the players' focus on remuneration was to blame for their early ejection from the tournament. These reports emphasized the players loss at the tournament with descriptive statements such as "three times losing finalists" ("Too much monetary focus"). By contrast, when newspapers reported on the men's national team's clashes with the FA about unpaid bonuses, these reports described the players' negotiating position and their displeasure with FA decision about remunerations. When the men's team were encouraged to play for pride, a gentler tone accompanied this demand ("Review Black Stars' bonuses"; "Win before you think of bonus"). The divergent ways in which media, FA, and Ministry of Youth and Sports officials treated players' requests to be paid demonstrate the underlying sexism that shaped the two national teams' experiences of the sport. Even when similar expectations are asked of both teams, discourse analysis reveals that the Black Stars occupy a special position which softened the criticisms lobbied against them.

Commenters to some online articles vehemently rejected the idea that national team players should play for pride. As one commenter wrote:

> What is GHC12K to a young girl dedicating her life to play for her nation? Black Stars pocketing $10,000 and bringing in nothing for the nation is ok with you. $100,000 in Brazil. What did the nation gain? Please don't write things to demoralize the girls.

Reacting to a perceived hypocrisy about the discrepancy in payment, the commenter noted the currency difference of Ghanaian cedis for the women and U.S. dollars for the men, as well as the amounts of payment. Furthermore, the commenter also emphasized that players are in fact playing and winning for the nation, and thus should be remunerated accordingly.

Similarly, others wrote in to reject the idea that players were greedy and unfocused by demanding payment. Another commenter wrote:

> This goddamn country. Gh don't treat women well. No respect. Bonus never gets paid. See how [Ministry of Youth] treats [Black] Stars. The Queens performance is shameful, but it is a 2-way street. See how you glorify and pamper these useless [Black] Star players.

Online commenters refused the biased media reports and noted the discrepancy in the treatment of the two senior national teams. Such reactions rejected the official discourse and stood in support of the women's national team as workers and national representative.

At other times, the success of the women's team was used as evidence that resources were ineffectively distributed. For some commenters, the women's team's successes were used to insult the men's coach and demand that the women's coach be assigned to the men's team. For example, when Black Queens coach Mercy Tagoe-Quarcoo led the team to victory at WAFU, some commenters suggested she be moved to the Black Stars to help them win. Similarly, when a search for a new head coach for the women's team was underway, comments under articles discussing the proposed choices included Tex, who wrote, "No offense to the women's team, but Sellas Tetteh needs to be in a position where he is coaching and funneling talent into the Black Stars. This is just a waste of resources". Others concurred, remarking that "this guy deserves to coach the Black Stars, sef" and describing Tetteh, the proposed coach, as "Black Stars material". Such comments demonstrated a hierarchy in the minds of some fans. Their words indicated that they saw the men's team as more important than the women's team, and therefore more deserving of resources to help them be at the top of their game.

Although most comparisons to the Black Stars were deployed to insult the men's team, or demand a reallocation of resources, on occasion, commenters talked about both teams in ways that suggested a unitary Ghanaian identity irrespective of gender. For example, responding to an article about a match between Ghana and Kenya women's teams, one commenter wrote, "Revenge for the Black Stars. Good luck". On another article about the team losing miserably (7-1) to Japan, another commenter responded, "7-1 without mercy for poor Ghanaian women! Our men will get them one day, inshallah!" Comments such as these aligned the two teams as equally representative of Ghana.

From these comments, the possibility that the national teams stood in for all Ghanaians regardless of gender emerges.

Tensions between men and women aside, observations from watching games at the stadium and in restaurants or bars suggested that women took pride and interest in how the Black Queens performed. For example, I watched the last of the AWCON tournament group matches on television at an outdoor restaurant in East Legon, a relatively wealthy suburb of Accra. When I arrived, one television was already set to the Ghana versus Cameroon match, played on November 23rd, 2018. There were only two other occupied tables and the staff of mostly women sat around the bar focused on the television. As at other restaurants and bars where I watched matches, I overheard the staff trash-talking the teams and expressing a desire for Ghana to win. From time to time, they would look at the other television for updates on the Algeria versus Mali match. An Algeria win would qualify Ghana for the next stage of the tournament as Ghana had lost to Mali and was at the bottom of their group. During halftime, the TV station showed a group of women in the market dancing and celebrating. One woman, representing the group said in Twi that they were the Mallam Market Traders Association, and they were supporting the Black Queens. Mallam Market is one of the largest markets in Accra and the association represented the (mostly) women who managed trade in the market. As her peers sang and danced behind her, the representative added, still speaking in Twi, "we are going to take that cup in Jesus' name. … as long as its African Women's Cup of Nations in Ghana, we're taking the cup". The market women on the television and the restaurant's staff of mostly women took keen interest in the tournament, suggesting that women's football mattered to these women, whether merely as entertainment or as a commentary on their relationship to the nation. This interest was also evident at the stadium where men and women attended to watch the matches. In a conversation with one spectator, she told me that she enjoyed watching football at the stadiums rather than at bars. She said "the bars are mostly very male-dominated. Not so fun to watch football".

The competition between Ghanaian men and women existed almost without challenge in official discursive spaces where women were asked to do more for less. Even when there was some pushback, such as from a group like Sugar Dem Ladies, the challenge was couched in terms that sought to maintain women's subordinated position, albeit under sweeter conditions – "all we ask is you sugar us too" (Hanson 2020, 104). However, beyond official discourse,

women's interest and pride in the Black Queens team offered glimpses of gendered national pride that produced the possibility of women as full citizens. The market women association's proclamations of pride in Ghanaian football and hopes of winning the cup are one such example. Likewise, the presence of men and women watching matches at the stadium, in bars and restaurants suggests that the competition advanced by media and other official outlets is muted in real life. Instead, as online comments indicate, there are some Ghanaians who see women footballers' labor as deserving of adequate pay and who see their work as important for the nation's pride and identity.

Discussion

The foregoing analysis demonstrates the contested landscape that women's football occupies in Ghana vis-à-vis questions of national identity and representation. Three key points are important to draw out. First is the value of employing the discursive terrain, which is the methodological framework I engage. By assessing the formal discourse against how ordinary Ghanaians engage and live this discourse, both in virtual space and via observations at the AWCON tournament, the ways that hegemonic narrative about national identity breaks down becomes evident. Second and related, the research highlights how media and state institutions effectively colonize articulations of nationalism and drown out competing discourses. This top-down heteropatriarchal national identity is then offered, without qualification, as what the people want. Yet popular challenge exists. As such, the third area of discussion reflects an active challenge against the devaluation of women's labor and women's place in the nation. Despite formal structures that sustain heteropatriarchal nationalism, football's popularity in Ghana paradoxically challenges the gendering of the nation by creating a space for women to be celebrated as unequivocal representatives of the hetero-masculine nation. Transformative feminist possibilities emerge from taking this affective restructuring of the nation seriously. These possibilities can have material implications for how activists and scholars alike engage the gendered construction of national identity.

In the first place, assessing gendered nationalism via popular discourse demonstrates important discrepancies between official and popular narratives. Furthermore, observations at the stadium, around town and in bars, showed meaningful challenges to these discourses. Although state and media narratives rhetorically championed support for women's football, these entities maintained very narrow parameters for how women took up space in the nation. This finding confirms what feminist and gender scholars of the Ghanaian state have

shown regarding women's marginalization within state-building processes and national identity formation (Ampofo et al. 2004; Amoah-Boampong 2004; Fallon 2003). When state entities pay attention to women, as Nana Akua Anyidoho and Takyiwah Manuh (2010) show, this attention is typically in the service of "development discourses". Development discourses reflect state preoccupation with economic growth. From this vantage point, women are not seen as citizens in their own right, but rather a population that needs to be "integrated into development, mainly for the sake of the nation" (Anyidoho and Manuh 2010, 272). In other words, when state organizations such as the FA, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, or the First Lady's office claim to be helping to advance women's place in the society, these efforts have a self-serving agenda rooted in development goals that keep women in subordinated positions rather than meeting women's actual needs. This self-serving agenda can be seen in several ways. First, by encouraging women footballers to accept less pay for their work a hierarchy that subordinates women's labor remains in place. Secondly, by linking women's football to women's reproductive capacity within the nation, women's labor is always tied to reproducing the heteropatriarchal nation and never for women's liberation from patriarchy. Yet, only taking these discursive moves into account discounts the popular challenge from both men and women concerning women's place in the nation. By paying attention to people's discordant reactions online, in bars, and at the stadium, various positions against heteropatriarchal nationalism become evident. The value of deploying an analytical framework that attends to both the discourse and its material implications is that failures in hegemonic narrative become clear and paths for challenging norms of inequality can be more readily identified.

Secondly, despite existing challenges to dominant heteropatriarchal nationalist discourses, the research shows how the apparatus of media and state entities, including sport journalists, administrators, and ministers work in concert to uphold patriarchy and women's subordinated position in the nation. The heteropatriarchal script that these organizations follow emphasizes women as reproductive vessels, devalue women's labor, and encourage competition between men and women as citizens of the nation. In particular, these institutions uphold the ideological construction of work and the masculinization of labor (Mohanty 1997). In so doing, they fix women's work as footballers within relations of patriarchy. As such, women footballers are asked to represent the "spirit of African womanhood", shore up masculinity, and quietly accept less by way of remuneration, resource allocation, and state support for their efforts.

In her study of embodied femininity and national identity in the Nigerian beauty pageant, Oluwakemi Balogun (2012) showed how discourses of African womanhood are rooted in sometimes discordant "cultural-nationalist" and "cosmopolitan-nationalist" ideals, which have the aim of projecting the nation as both global and local. In the case of women's football in Ghana, cultural narratives of national identity emphasize conservative ideas of women as keepers of national values that sustain heterosexual patriarchy. Reference is made to the spirit of African womanhood in various guises from meetings with local kings, to the Ministry of Youth and Sport press conferences, and newspaper reports on how women footballers should behave. Likewise, cosmopolitan narratives globalize the nation through, for example, the production of modernity at the tournament's opening ceremony. Regardless of the kind of nationalism advanced by powerful media and state institutions, a commitment to heterosexual patriarchy is apparent in these discourses and their attendant actions. This commitment is then relayed to the general population as state support of women and idealized forms of nationalism.

Thirdly, given the rootedness of heteropatriarchy, it becomes ever more important to highlight moments of challenge against this dominant discourse. The preceding analysis has shown how, although transnational feminist understanding of the gendered nation is accurate from the perspective of the state and media, attention to a broader landscape highlights pushback against the hegemony of gendered nationalist discourse. In so doing, this research revises how we conceptualize gendered nationalisms by taking popular counter discourses more seriously, thereby offering insight into strategic approaches for challenging heteropatriarchal nationalism and its material implications. Saavedra's(2003) findings that the role of culture is overstated as an impediment to women's football on the African continent can be seen when official positions are assessed against popular reactions to the women's game. Likewise, attention to voices of dissent identifies areas for potential solidarity between men and women in the construction of gender inclusive national identity. As my findings demonstrate, the context in which Ghanaians challenge sexist notions of nationalism is constrained by powerful state and media entities that extend patriarchal benevolence. Popular challenge against these official positions is characterized by shared experiences of capitalist exploitation and a passion for football that has the potential to transcend gender inequalities.

However, these individual challenges do not amount to collective action. Rather, this analysis also demonstrates how pushback against gendered inequality currently happens on an individual level, thereby limiting the capacity for transformative change.

Conclusion

This article has shown the intricacies of the relationship between football, a popular gendered cultural pastime, the construction of the modern nation, and national identity. This research also highlights how ordinary citizens responded to official state and media narratives about women's subordinated place in the body politic. Specifically, and contrary to official discourse, I showed how citizens affirm women's full belonging within the nation and entitlement to serve as national representatives. Future research on this topic should extend the African and Black feminist epistemologies that guide this research to include interviews with players. These interviews will provide an opportunity to understand women footballers' lived experiences at the intersection of national representative, worker, and citizen. Likewise, taking the perspectives of fans can further illuminate their reasons for resisting the status quo of women's place in the body politic. By incorporating players' perspectives, this research can further identify opportunities for challenging the heteropatriarchy that structures women footballers' experiences and identify avenues for transforming the national landscape towards a feminist horizon.

Examining nationalism through such a highly gendered site as football is valuable because doing so illuminates paradoxes and challenges accepted wisdoms about the entrenchment of, and support for heteropatriarchy. In other words, the preceding analysis points feminist scholars in the direction of taking popular challenges to hegemonic discourses of heteropatriarchal nationalism seriously. Paying attention to these challenges demands a revision of the persistence of gendered nationalisms as heteropatriarchal and binary. Instead, those moments in which the status quo is challenged can be amplified towards creating more gender inclusive nations. Using football, which is a male-dominated sport, as a site for the analysis of gendered nationalism presents an opportunity to examine how men and women alike can embrace women taking up spaces foreclosed to them in the postcolonial nation, including the space of citizen, worker, and national representative. My findings show sites of resistance and opportunities to challenge state imposition of patriarchy and women's constrained inclusion in the nation. In addition to the scholarly contribution, the above findings have implications for activists as well. By exploiting the tension between popular and official discourses, activists will be

encouraged to find ways to leverage individual responses that challenge sexism and collate these into a collective strategy for garnering inclusive citizenship.

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