

# **Social Positionality and Xenophobia: The Case of Rugby Player Tendai Mtawarira in South Africa**

by

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## **Abstract**

This paper uses the case of Tendai Mtawarira in 2008 to highlight how the nature and impact of xenophobia is diverse for people of African heritage. Mtawarira, a Zimbabwean rugby player has represented South Africa at a world cup, yet his participation and selection involved many contestations and controversies because he was born in Zimbabwe. In many ways he represented the ‘invasion’ by *makwerekwere* (African foreigners) into spaces that some South Africans of African heritage were seeking to enter. Debates on citizenship and belonging are often couched in xenophobic language and spaces such as sport can offer an illuminating insight into these contestations. Mtawarira’s experiences of xenophobia are however different from poor and illegal African foreigners living in the townships who suffer physical attacks, police brutality and are in constant fear for their lives. The paper uses analysis of reports, speeches, online debates, television and radio programmes, to highlight how contestations around Mtawarira’s identity is critical to understanding the complexity of nationality and belonging in post-apartheid South Africa.

## **Introduction**

In 2009 South Africa experienced internal turmoil as xenophobic attacks on Black foreigners from other African countries led to deaths, beatings and loss of property. Whilst there are many explanations for this phenomenon, it is important to highlight how this intersection of race, ethnicity, class, citizenship and nationality influences the experience of everyday life in South Africa. In this paper, I use the emergence of Tendai Mtawarira as a star rugby player for the national team to interrogate how reaction to his rise by different sections of South African society illuminate the tensions around race, citizenship and access to space as researching sport provides fascinating avenues of analysis in life.

Sport is a readymade arena to play out the tensions in any social system. Post-apartheid South Africa offers an interesting backdrop to understanding how sport can be a space to promote exclusion. South Africa has a long history of exclusion based on race, gender, sexuality and citizenship. Hence, the story of Tendai Mtawarira is a continuation of this paradigm of exclusion albeit in a different context. Thus, this paper is an analysis of various texts including newspapers, magazines, blogs, web posts, social media comments and radio and television interviews relating to Tendai Mtawarira to highlight how Mtawarira's race and nationality were played out within South African media and brought into question during his participation at 2007 World Cup in France.

The central objective of the paper is to use the case of one athlete as a microcosm for analysing how experiences of xenophobia are dependent on the social positionality of the victim. Black foreigners do not all suffer xenophobia in the same way or at the same time, as the experiences are mediated by class, gender and background. Tendai Mtawarira ultimately achieved South African citizenship but his case remains an important gaze into how some South Africans of African heritage created and recreated African people not of South African heritage as outsiders.

Xenophobic attacks which portray the open hatred of African people not of South African heritage were mainly perpetrated by poor South Africans of African heritage on other poor African people living with and around them. Mtawarira's case is different in that he is not poor, attacks on him were not physical and they were mainly orchestrated by senior politicians. This is important in that it shows how xenophobia is part of the socio-political context of South Africa. In this paper I do not intend to explain or analyse the source of this xenophobia nor do I intend to analyse the wider xenophobic attacks. The paper does not seek to analyse the history of race and sport in South Africa or the debates around quota systems and transformation in white dominated sports such as rugby. My intention is rather focused on how the framing of Tendai Mtawarira's case shows xenophobia is not limited to poor African people living in the ghettos and poor neighborhoods but rather transcends class and location.

Mtawarira's move to play for South Africa is largely seen as the right move by Zimbabweans to ensure the growth of his career. Instead of harvesting the fruits of the years that it puts into rugby development in schools, Zimbabwe has become a breeding ground for international clubs and other nations who poach its free talent at a huge expense for the national team. Zimbabwe has the COTTCO rugby, the biggest schools festival in the world, and over 5000 players took part this year, but once the boys complete their studies, doors open for them to pursue their careers elsewhere. (The Herald, July 13, 2013 <http://www.herald.co.zw/itssad-we-will-lose-all-this-talent/>). Mtawarira's rise to stardom was largely portrayed in a celebratory manner by newspapers in Zimbabwe as evidenced by the sports headline in the Zimbabwean Independent of 25 January 2009 which stated that: Tendai Mtawarira knocking down the barrier (<http://www.theindependent.co.zw/2009/06/25/tendai-mtawarira-knocking-down-the-barrier/>).

## Background

It is important to provide a brief historical background that highlights the plight of Black foreigners in post-apartheid South Africa. Whilst there is a detailed history that explains race in the country, this paper is selective in its focus so as not lose the essence of how citizenship and the creation of 'makwerekwere' (derogatory name for Black foreigners) has evolved. The independence of South Africa was celebrated across Africa with the promise of good life for all in a new democratic Rainbow Nation that embraced difference and diversity. South Africa however continued in a state of late apartheid pronounced by strong grip of white capital on land and productive assets. Political independence did not bring economic transformation except for a few Black political elites who have amassed great wealth in the midst of poverty. Disenchantment set in amongst the poor Black communities reeling under years of poor service delivery and struggles to earn a decent wage (Nord and Assubuji 2008). Influx of Black foreigners from across the continent competing for crumbs at the bottom led to a serious war of survival. It is at this juncture that I discuss the most notable event in South Africa's relations with Black foreigners. May 11th 2008 is a day steeped in South African consciousness, as a wave of violence against Black foreigners spread across the country. Nord and Assubuji (2008: 1) argue that:

...by the end of last month 62 migrants were murdered, while hundreds, including women and children, have been attacked, raped, and have had their houses and belongings looted or destroyed. The most severely affected groups are Africans from neighbouring states, such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique, but migrants from more distant countries, such as Nigeria and Somalia, as well as a few South Africans, have also been victims of attacks...up to 35 000 people have fled from their homes and are camping out in temporary shelters, churches and police stations. Thousands more have returned to their countries of origin.

These attacks were punctuated by a deep resentment of foreigners which surprised the world given the brutal history of suffering under apartheid for Black people in South Africa. Whilst much has been written about the cause of these attacks what is clear is how Black politicians were complicit in fanning hatred and intolerance for Black foreigners. This is particularly interesting given that the attacks were centred on poor migrants of African origin. Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh and Singh (2005) highlight that foreigners in South Africa are victims of discrimination at the hands of government officials, the police, banks, private companies and private organizations contracted to manage their detention and deportation. Politicians are also allegedly using foreigners as a scapegoat for lack of service delivery. Xenophobia is thus more or less institutionalised within South African social structures. Studies by Jacobsen and Bailey (2004) highlight how foreigners usually carry money on their person and how the police view undocumented foreigners as 'mobile ATMs' to supplement their salaries (Landau, Ramjathan Keogh and Singh, 2005).

There is a race and class bias in the xenophobic attacks in South Africa. SAMP (2001: 28) argues that much of the discrimination and violence directed against migrants by some South Africans has a racial angle, as illustrated by the differential treatment accorded white and Black migrants to the country. Non-citizens are thus perceived or treated unequally. The great divide, as in many aspects of South African social life, is racial. White immigrants are not immune from the subtler forms of South African resentment, but their presence does not prompt the kind of panic and hostility that seems to attach to African migrants, immigrants and refugees. In explaining the xenophobic attacks, Harris (2002) uses the sociological concept of scapegoating which locates xenophobia in contexts of social uncertainty and transition. As noted by Tshitereke (1999:4):

In the post-apartheid epoch, while people's expectations have been heightened, a realisation that delivery is not immediate has meant that discontent and indignation are at their peak. People are more conscious of their deprivation than ever before ... This is the ideal situation for a phenomenon like xenophobia to take root and flourish. South Africa's political transition to democracy has exposed the unequal distribution of resources and wealth in the country.

There are many competing explanations for the xenophobic attacks on foreigners which provide a complex intersection of historical, economic and political factors. For Neocosmos (2008) poverty and lack alone do not explain why African people not of South African heritage are targeted in these attacks. His argument is necessary in the analysis of this paper as it shows why Mtawarira's case provides an important examination of the state involvement in immigration and citizenship. Neocosmos (2008: 2006) argues that xenophobia has to be understood as apolitical ideology which has emerged in a context gripped by the politics of fear after apartheid. This politics has three major components namely 'a state discourse of xenophobia, a discourse of South African exceptionalism and a conception of citizenship founded exclusively on indigeneity' (Neocosmos 2008: 587). State discourse of xenophobia is based on how various arms of government from politicians, police, detention camps and even army all emphasize the message of invasion by illegal immigrants since the 1990s. This message is based on inflammatory stereotypes based on unsubstantiated information. The South African state has thus adopted a xenophobic nature and police brutality on foreigners is one such form.

Identity and indigeneity has become an important factor in access to resources and space in South Africa. Nyamjoh (2006) argues that in post-apartheid South Africa citizenship was reduced to indigeneity and formalized by legislation. Legislating indigeneity is one way of officially closing space to perceived outsiders such as Mtawarira's case will highlight. Harris (2002) provides an analysis of how the media portrayal of African foreigners fans the images of invasion and calamity brought by these 'people.' These stereotypes and generalizations explain why attacks have concentrated on Africa foreigners. South African media is thus crucial in the creation of stereotypes that fan xenophobia.

The media is often accused of misinformation and lack of analysis when creating sensational headlines about foreigners (SAMP, 2001). The major problem is the representation of Black foreigners as illegal immigrants and criminals in South African media. A report by the MMP (2003: 84) notes ‘...there is no doubt that public attitudes have been formed by highly emotional media images that portray South Africa as “flooded” or “overrun” by undocumented migrants from the rest of Africa.

## **Race, Nationality, Xenophobia and Citizenship: Conceptual Approach**

What is important in understanding the concepts of race, nationality, xenophobia and citizenship is that they are all socially constructed though in the case of race and xenophobia biology plays a part. This means that the meaning of race or nationality can be contested and redefined. Citizenship and belonging are fluid concepts especially in an ever globalizing world with rapid migration, locality is increasingly being challenged. What underpins these concepts is the concept of social exclusion. Social exclusion in this case is defined in spatial and temporal ways as a process in which race, nationality and citizenship intersect to produce conditions in which certain groups are cast as outsiders (Holzmann and Jorgensen, 2000). Intersecting forms of exclusion are thus mutually reinforcing and perpetuate each other. In the context of this paper theoretical explanations of exclusion are understood within this framework of intersecting factors. To understand the case of Mtawarira one has to first analyse the fluid nature of his constructed identity as a “foreigner playing for the Springboks (South African rugby team).” This identity is mediated by his race, nationality, class and citizenship. How he suffers xenophobia as a Zimbabwean is also explained by his social location and the intersection of various factors outlined above.

The paper thus focuses on the intersection of race, nationality and citizenship as interlocked systems of exclusion. Winant (2000) argues that race is a concept which signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies. Like xenophobia, racism is based on ontologically connected to the categories of “Other” and “Strange” fitting the theory We (not strange) versus They (the Strange)” (<http://www.ukessays.com/essays/sociology/the-xenophobia-through-the-social-theorysociology-essay.php>). In analysing the construction and articulation of race and xenophobia, Burns, Kamali and Rydgren (2001) use the concept of collective identity to highlight how groups distinguish themselves from others. There is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of "race," and the socio historical categories employed to differentiate among these groups reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be imprecise if not completely arbitrary (Omi and Winant, 1994). Hall (1993) argues that in contemporary societies we are seeing an increasing diversity of subject positions, social experiences, and cultural identities that cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore are constantly evolving and changing. Concepts of race, nationality and citizenship are thus fluid and contested.

Nationality and citizenship are based on a legal relationship between the individual and the state. The state has a set of legal obligations and responsibilities to the individual and vice versa. This legal obligation includes access to fundamental things each among them a sense of belonging and security. For non-citizens and those without a legal relationship with the state there are no protections and the experiences in South Africa highlighting how state institutions are not responsive to illegal migrants. State institutions are actually involved in undermining and limiting space for non-citizens. Xenophobia then becomes a hatred or fear of foreigners (which may include people from foreign countries who are legally resettled). It affects even those who have a legal relationship with the state and in South Africa even locals who looked like foreigners were often attacked. In South Africa xenophobia is not only an attitude, it is a practice which results in 'intense tension and violence by some South Africans towards immigrants' (Tshitereke, 1999: 4).

### **Race, Citizenship and Space in South African Sport**

Sport in South Africa is intricately linked with race because of apartheid. The apartheid system of racial separation had ensured that sport was a segregated enterprise. White sports flourished with a lot of state and business support during and post-apartheid. Keim (2003) shows that after the 1970 banning of South Africa from the Olympics it took the banning of rugby in 1981 for white South Africans to consider international sport boycott as a reason to change the system. In sporting terms, rugby was and still remains the symbol of Afrikaner identity. This sport has remained an important part of Afrikaner culture post-apartheid and attempts at transformation have been slow and controversial. Race is thus intrinsically linked to any discussion of sport in South Africa. Sporting space is racialized in multiple and complex ways that illuminate the many tensions existent in South Africa's rainbow nation.

Rugby has deep cultural and social attachments amongst white South Africans and focusing on this sport allows for nuanced insight into space, race and identity. Carlin (2008) argues that rugby more than any other sport became the lasting symbol of the apartheid state yet now they represent a South Africa ruled by a Black government. This transformation has been riddled with complexities given that before 1994 Black and mixed race South Africans had supported visiting teams especially the New Zealand team. The Springboks, as the South African rugby team is affectionately known has remained dominated by white Afrikaner males at all structures with limited strides in promoting rugby among Black communities. To stress the importance of rugby in the future of race relations in South Africa, Migozzi (2010: 253) argues that:

Rugby appears to be a valuable topic allowing reading and analyzing the South African notions of space and society. Its deep cultural impact and the attachment — almost religious — that a section of the population of the country has for this sport establish it as a true symbol fraught with the social stakes of the South African nation. As a highly political topic and a particularly interesting focus for the press, rugby is discussed by elected representatives and gives rise to deep controversies over points such as skin colour inequalities, which are major issues for the future of the country.

Rugby more than any other sport in South Africa represent an arena of competition not only because of its history but also of the increasing monetary rewards from the sport. The dominance of white players and administrators is seen continued form of segregation. Catsam (2010) in arguing the importance of rugby as a contested space highlights how laws under apartheid such ‘pass laws, liquor laws, the Group Areas Act, and the entire apparatus of Petit Apartheid served to restrict the participation not only of Black people with whites on the same teams, but also prohibited them from playing against one another, even with segregated teams.’ He further notes how post 1994 throughout the chairmanship of Luyt, South African rugby authorities were in constant conflict with the ANC government over transformation. At one time Luyt brought then President Nelson Mandela was brought to court to explain policies of the government (Catsam, 2010). Post 1994 rugby was always imbued with overt and covert forms of racism such as:

...players using racist slurs on and off the field; the use of Die Stem, the Afrikaans former National Anthem at games; the waving of the former South African flag and other banners with the old apartheid colors on them; the 1996 selection of a white player who had been convicted of the manslaughter of a black farmhand onto the national team; the use of racist slurs by SARFU executives, including Luyt; and the continuing under-representation of nonwhite players in the major competitions (with the nadir being reached in 1998 when of the 120 players representing South African sides in the Super 12 competition, only four were not white).

For some white administrators and players rugby is not a Black even in post-apartheid era where multiculturalism is being promoted. Influx of Black players may be seen as an ‘invasion’ by white Afrikaners thus for so long the argument used to exclude Black players has been about lack of talent or ability to play the game at the highest levels. This history provides an important context to understand how rugby before Mtawarira was already a contested space. Cros (2013) provides an analysis positional segregation in which the most prestigious positions which are likely to influence the game such as over lock, number 8 and fly-half are dominated by white people while the few Black players in South African rugby dominated the wings. This is based on a historical belief that Black people are not rugby people and therefore cannot be trusted to carry the fortunes of the team. People like Rich (2007) have tried to justify the dominance of white players by using a genetic argument as noted below:

Rugby is a sport where big, strong and fast people excel and if you don't start off with those attributes you are just going to struggle... I don't know why it is, but it is a fact that the Afrikaner cultural group just seems to produce some freakishly built people with a freakish genetic makeup...It is not racist that these players play ahead of black players, just as it is not racist that players with Pacific Island backgrounds are starting to dominate backlines in New Zealand (where) a lot of the so-called white players are giving up rugby on the basis that they are tired of being smashed by the big islanders. It is all about genetics.

In this argument discrimination within rugby is not based on racism but rather genetics which makes the Afrikaner better suited for the sport. The rugby national teams popularly known as the Springboks remains an important part of white Afrikaner identity hence the need to 'fence off' Black intrusion. Its importance is summed up by Nauright and Chandler (1996: 236) who argue that rugby's,...social significance may be largely confined to providing a haven of comfort, familiarity, escape in short, nostalgia- for white, male South Africans as they attempt to adapt culturally to the dizzying changes in the socio-political order, and retain a sense of their own distinctive place there in. It is thus interesting to note the general support Mtawarira has received from the Afrikaner community when he was banned as measured by the posts on line. This general support has to be contextualized in how Mtawarira as a Black foreigner is not seen as a threat to white space in the same way as the increase of black space in South Africa through the quota system which has always been threatened to force transformation.

## **Methodological Approach**

The study used qualitative content analysis to understand meanings associated with messages. This involved content analysis on purposively sampled speeches, newspaper reports, blogs, editorials, interviews, statements on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Such an analysis is built on the need to provide a wide array of views on the issue under study. The use of the internet as a viable research arena is growing through the use of various methodological innovations. Internet research was conducted for a period of six months between February and July 2013. Such a period allowed for a thorough search of reports, postings, blogs and communications about Tendai Mtawarira from 2007 to 2013. The various forms of communication and material collected online was then analysed to gain a sense of emerging narratives from various actors within South African rugby.

Content analysis is whereby we sifted through the content of various on line communications, identifying the words, phrases, symbols and language used. It established the meanings, representations and xenophobic representations in debates on Mtawarira. The analysis focused on language, symbols, visual images and other forms of semiosis in the as means of portraying a particular gender discourse.



Given the power of the written and spoken word in reinforcing particular xenophobic beliefs, I sought to describe, interpret, analyze, and critique social life reflected in text. Language used in discussing Mtawarira thus offers a glimpse into social organisation of a South African society. Dominant discourses around race and nationality are celebrated, valorised and reinforced in written communications. Many studies have used one athlete as a case study to analyse how an individual's experience can influence socio-political processes. For example DeSchriver, Rascher and Shapiro (2014) highlight how David Beckham impacted on match attendance in the American soccer league. They highlight how Beckham was instrumental in increasing the appeal of soccer in America. Beckham is a sociological phenomenon, with more than 60,000 web pages of information about his movements. His popularity is greater than that of the British Royal Family (<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/david-beckham-and-the-selling-of-european-football/#>). Hutchison (1996) provides an analysis of how the O.J Simpson case provided insights into race, sex and class in America. Kellner (2001) uses the case of basketball legend Michael Jordan to highlight how media culture creates spectacle and promote global capitalist consumption through the creation of super heroes. Single athletes can thus transcend society and their experiences provide important insights into social processes.

### **Tendai Mtawarira: Background to the 'Beast'**

Tendai Nihal Mtawarira was born on 1 August 1985 in Harare, Zimbabwe. Mtawarira started his high school education at Churchill Boys High, in Harare but was later given a rugby scholarship to attend the prestigious Peter House Boys Schools in Marondera. By the time he joined Peter House, Mtawarira was already part of the Zimbabwean 'under nineteen' setup having joined the team at fifteen. His potential for greatness was apparent at a very young age. He won his first cap in 2008. Tendai Mtawarira is not the first Zimbabwean to change citizenship and play for South African sports team. Below I outline other Black and white Zimbabwean players who played rugby in South Africa. An opinion piece Jupiter Punungwe (2009) argues:

Let us set the record straight. Tendai Mtawarira is not the first Zimbabwean to play for the Boks. Adrian Garvey and Bob Skinstad, like Mtawarira, were born in Zimbabwe. Steve Elworthy, director of South Africa's Twenty20 Cricket Tournament in 2007, was also born in Zimbabwe, and played cricket for the SA national team. The timing of his case is thus curious and provides important insights into how xenophobia is spreading to sporting spaces.

A report on 6 June on Radio Nehanda begins by asking:

Has xenophobia reached the rugby field? Tendai 'Beast' Mtawarira is born in Harare, Zimbabwe and he is also a Springbok who represents South Africa on the rugby field. What is making him so unique is, that it's almost seems as if the department of Sport and Recreation wants to use him as an example for illegal immigrants 'stealing' South Africans opportunities (<http://nehandaradio.com/2010/06/06/xenophobia-in-sports-asthe-beast-is-removed/>).

The high influx of Black foreigners into South Africa is experienced at a moment in which some poor South African of African heritage are becoming disillusioned by African National Congress (ANC) government. This disillusionment manifests in numerous ways and the rise of foreigners offers many actors including politicians a scapegoat for the failure in service provision and continued poverty. Brian Mujati and Tonderai Chivhanga, the other Zimbabweans to play for South Africa also faced challenges because of their citizenship yet research shows all white players in the list below faced little or no problems with citizenship in both pre and post-apartheid South Africa. Mtawarira's nationality alone was not problematic but when combined with his skin colour, he represents the hundreds of thousands of illegal Black migrants milking the system at the expense of the poor natives. White players have found it easier to change nationality especially under Apartheid. Mtawarira is thus not the first foreigner to be picked into the national rugby team. Gary Teichmann actually rose to become captain of the team which shows the unexceptional nature of Tendai Mtawarira's case when placed in a historical context. What is critical in this case is the timing of his bid to play for South Africa given the wider political and social issues surrounding xenophobia.

## **South African Government versus Tendai Mtawarira**

The African National Congress member of national assembly sports committee, Butana Komphela issued a press release and adverts in the newspapers accusing South African rugby of disrespecting the law. Paul Rees writing for the British Guardian on 12 January 2010 notes the following:

Butana Komphela, chairman of the South African national assembly sports committee, said he intended to have the South African Rugby Union (SARU) charged for illegally playing Mtawarira on the grounds that foreigners should not be picked for national sides..." The government is going to punish rugby," said Komphela. "We are going to charge SA Rugby for fielding a foreign national without proper requirements. The portfolio committee has inquired as to why the Beast is still playing for South Africa if he is a foreign national. It is a contravention of the laws. The government will deport him to Zimbabwe. He is here on a work permit and he is flouting it. We have no problem with him playing for the Sharks, but this doesn't mean he has acquired citizenship.

The statement frames the problem as a legal issue in which Mtawarira's nationality plays no part in the decision. This is captured by the allegation that the player had no proper requirements and residency papers as required by the law. The law also stated that the rugby union also had to seek approval from the sports ministry before fielding a foreign player. What is however curious is the timing given that Mtawarira had already represented South Africa more than eight times.

To better frame the narrative at the time when this decision was taken by the government it is important to analyse the statement by Komphela further. Part of the statement by the ministry reads:

While Tendai is a live wire on the field of play, the question is whether it is, in the first place, justifiable to say he has scarce skills – the rationale that would have enabled him to obtain the current work permit. If we go the route our rugby administrators are requesting us to take, and facilitate the fast-tracking of Tendai's citizenship, what would this say to all rugby players in our country? We cannot as a government department responsible for sport and recreation in this country, afford to insult our players like this.

On line reactions to this statement was varied and also highlighted confusion over knowledge of what South African law. An example is Punungwe (2009) who argues that the statement not only proves the lack of knowledge of South African law and international standards but they also reveal their racism and xenophobia. He was specifically concentrating on the section of the statement that allowing Mtawarira was an insult to South African players noting how immigration law exceptional skill do not mean that the skill is non-existent in the country, but are meant to augment the existing skills base. As such there was no reason to refuse him that specific visa. It is this part of the statement that shows the real narrative around the ban on Mtawarira. It fits into the dominant views of perpetrators of xenophobic violence who claimed that foreign African people were stealing their jobs. For Komphela and those of similar ilk, Tendai Mtawarira was 'stealing' one of the best jobs around at the expense of a South African people of African heritage.

There were however other people who supported the move by Komphela providing arguments over the merits of stopping a foreign player representing for South Africa. One such commentator on line argued that 'Komphela's concern is justified. The Springboks (and the Proteas and Bafana Bafana for that matter) represent the South African nation on the field and should therefore be comprised of South African nationals.' Examples are also provided by such commentators of how for example English footballer Wayne Rooney will never play for South Africa. Another interesting dimension which emerged also supported by statements from sports ministry was that the Mtawarira case was just another case of white Afrikaner rugby administrators thinking they can run roughshod for the laws of South Africa.

This begs the question on who gave the green light for the selection of Mtawarira and why was he allowed playing many games if the minister had not sanctioned the move. Then Minister of Sport Stofile is said to have sanctioned the use of the player yet the national assembly through Khomphela was raising objections. In this scenario Mtawarira becomes a pawn of greater and historical politics between rugby authorities and the Black government. He can thus be seen as victim of circumstances and his case was convenient at a time when government is in constant clash with rugby administrators.

What is interesting in this debate is also how Mtawarira framed himself within the media as a victim of an unjust system which was denying him the chance to play for 'his country'. In an interview with the Sunday Independent Tendai Mtawarira noted that:

I am a South African at heart. I love this country. It has become my home. It is everything to me. Wearing the green and gold of the Springboks is a huge honour for me. That jersey is part of me. The green and gold flows in my blood. I feel just as much pride as any other guy in the team... I want to put my body on the line for South Africa when I play. I hold nothing back. I give it my all. This country has been amazing to me and that makes me want to work harder. So many people have embraced me and it is humbling to know that they are behind me, supporting me all the way (<http://www.ruggaworld.com/2010/01/17/im-a-bok-nothing-else-beast/>).

This statement is premised on the need to show belonging and 'love' for the country. The narrative of patriotism and nationhood that he turns to in the statement underlie this need to support his legal fight for residency and citizenship. Under International Rugby Board law he was eligible to play and he had already played numerous games for South Africa. That legal argument is thus not sufficient on its own to convince the South African state that he has the right credentials for 'citizenship.' What is interesting is how a large coalition on line of both Black and white rugby supporters supporting Mtawarira as he also alludes to widespread support in the quote above. As a rugby player of proven quality and integral part of the team it was easy for many supporters to go beyond the narrow debate on xenophobia to appreciate his skill. A comment on line by a Zimbabwean resident highlighted the perceived hypocrisy in this widespread support noting: 'it is interesting to see the support for the Beast not to be deported but how many are fighting for the hundreds of undocumented Zimbabweans rounded up daily and bundled across the border' (Anonymous on line communication). For some Mtawarira represented the 'right kind of foreigner' contributing to South African society unlike other Black foreigners constructed as 'criminals, poor and bad people.'

## **Response of South African Rugby Union**

The responses of the South African Rugby Union are also instructive in understanding the political contestations around sport in post-apartheid context. Transformation of sport especially rugby has been contested since majority rule in 1994 especially on the number of Black players integrated into the senior team. The South African government and rugby union thus share a fractured past punctuated by mutual mistrust. Oregan Hoskins, the South African Rugby Union (SARU) president, denied the law had been broken, saying that the sports minister, Makhenkesi Stofile, had sanctioned Mtawarira's inclusion in the Springbok squad:

I remain positive about this...I do not believe his inclusion in the national squad is a lost cause and we are preparing a presentation to the government...We are going to try and sway the government to look at this as a special case, which is not unprecedented in other countries. The Beast has shown his bona fide colours having been here since just out of school and has given his life to rugby. I am going to make sure I cover every nook and cranny, and maybe even go with him to Zimbabwe to make sure we have covered all the bases so we can make the application thoroughly (Rees, 2010).

The statement highlights that initially SARU thought they had done enough to get approval without meeting the requirements of the law. Legally Mtawarira had a work permit that allowed him to play for the Natal Sharks but remained a Zimbabwean national. Without South African citizenship he was not eligible to play. This is why Gerresten (2010) reported that:

Home Affairs Department spokesman Siobhan McCarthy said that regardless of whether foreign nationals were in the country on work or study permits, or married to South Africans, it took five years before permanent residence could be applied for and a further five years for a citizenship application to be made.

The legal debate was thus against Mtawarira yet with much social and political pressure the Home Affairs Department finally gave him citizenship.

South African rugby has since 1994 precariously managed a fragile relationship with various arms of the ANC government especially the sports ministry. This relationship is riddled with suspicion and mistrust over the true intentions of each side. The government accuses the authorities of doing little to promote transformation and protecting white interests within rugby whilst the authorities argue that transformation without talent will destroy the competitiveness of South African rugby.

This uneasy relationship is important to outline when discussing the responses of the rugby authorities when Mtawarira was banned. The allegations of unlawful conduct made by the government and splashed in newspapers were unprecedented by pointed out to a deep rooted hostility aimed at rugby authorities. This led to the editorial in *The Mercury* of November 16, 2009 questioning:

But why did the department have to make this a public issue just ahead of a major Test match? Does it have an inherent hatred for rugby and its officials, or is this simply about of old-fashioned xenophobia, as some are now alleging? Hoskins response has thus to be understood within this context where politics of race, citizenship and belonging are contested. At the time he also accepted the ban as noted in the following statement: We have had extensive and robust conversations with government on this issue. But we respect the authority of the ministry and have instructed our selectors in that regard (<http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90779/90871/7025192.html>).

Wielding the stick was a way of the government to show the rugby authorities that ultimately they make the decisions in South Africa.

### **An Outsider Within: Analysis of Mtawarira's Position**

Sociological analysis of Mtawarira's case reveals interesting dynamics in how sport, citizenship, race and space are contested in the new South Africa. Apartheid left a lasting legacy which is still being experienced in continued lack of involvement of the Black majority in certain spaces including rugby. Questions of identity and belonging define insiders and outsiders. The banning of Mtawarira for a period shows how identity has become an important rallying point in the politics of contestation as the ANC government increasingly faces serious challenges in meeting the promises of independence. There are five crucial points to note from how Mtawarira was framed as a criminal by ANC members and the subsequent fight for his reinstatement. Firstly, xenophobia is not a 'property' of the poor and marginalised. Reports of violence and murders against Black foreigners have tended to portray xenophobia as being perpetrated only by poor people. It is clear from this case that political elites are also xenophobic and that institutions within South Africa also tend to be discriminatory when dealing with African foreigners. Politicians have used the rhetoric of African 'invasion' to explain failure in providing services and security to the poor and the media has been implicit in supporting this view as noted earlier in the paper.

Secondly, whilst most African foreigners suffer xenophobia because of it is institutionalised, the level and nature of discrimination differs with class. Whilst Mtawarira was denied the chance to play the sport he loves because of xenophobia, hundreds have lost their lives and others their homes and livelihoods.

Class and money offers protections that most poor foreigners cannot afford such as accommodation in gated communities with high security. It also ensures that you have the best lawyers and in this case a powerful rugby union fighting in your corner to get your citizenship regularised. The third point to note is how African foreigners are caught up within a system which has a complex history of conflict and ultimately end up as victims and pawns in power games. Mtawarira's case provided insights into the continued contests between rugby authorities and government over the control of the sport. Foreigners are increasingly being used as pawns in contesting space and livelihoods as some South Africans of African heritage view them as competition for jobs in an employment market dominated by white employers. White employers are alleged to prefer Black foreigners because they are cheaper and easy to exploit. Whilst Mtawarira does not fit into this category, his presence in the national team represents another job for some South Africans of African heritage lost to a *makwerekwere*.

Fourthly, sport can be a vehicle to achieve personal goals and ambitions for those with the skill and opportunity to do so. It can also assist in overcoming structural barriers to citizenship as shown by the massive effort and pressure on home affairs ministry to offer Mtawarira citizenship. The fifth issue is how context matters in analysing social issues. Tendai Mtawarira is not the first Zimbabwean, Black or white to represent Zimbabwe yet his selection created controversy mainly because it happened at a time when citizenship and xenophobia were highly contested in South Africa. His case became symbolic at a time when certain sections of South African politics wanted to highlight the 'invasion' of African foreigners in spaces where some South Africans of African heritage were finding it difficult to make it. The government also saw an opportunity to put in check rugby administrators who have for years resisted wide ranging transformation of the sport.

## Conclusion

This paper offers an exploratory analysis into how the debate around Tendai Mtawarira's place within the South African rugby team has been constructed around race, class and citizenship. Further research focusing on ethnographic views of Mtawarira's own experiences and thoughts of South Africans maybe required to buttress the arguments raised in this exploratory paper that used discourse analysis to interrogate meaning and context of events surrounding the banning of Mtawarira from representing South Africa. The discussion has shown the different narratives that can be used to frame the ban from various positions. What is clear from the paper is that rugby in South Africa remains an important arena to understand intersections of race, class and citizenship. The Rainbow Nation project remains contested and negotiated with a myriad of problems facing the majority of the people. In such contexts xenophobia festers supported by political views and newspaper headlines that portray stigma and fear framing African foreigners as 'invaders.' Such imagery is appropriate for the Mtawarira the 'Beast' whose claim to fame is his strength on the rugby field. The paper concludes that xenophobia is perpetrated and suffered by all despite of class, age or gender what differs is the nature, consequences and experiences of that xenophobia.

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