

South Africa and the Global Game: Introduction¹

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On 11 May 1994, the festivities for Nelson Mandela's presidential inauguration included a soccer match between South Africa and Zambia at Ellis Park in Johannesburg. At halftime, Mandela's helicopter landed on the pitch. As the president stepped out onto the grass, the huge crowd erupted in a thunderous roar. When play resumed, the South Africans seemed electrified and went on to win the match 2-1. On 15 May 2004 in Zurich, Switzerland, Mandela wept with joy when the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) awarded South Africa the right to host the 2010 World Cup. South Africans celebrated in the streets as if they had not simply won hosting rights, but the World Cup itself! 'To some extent this outburst of euphoria surpassed 1994,' commented Ahmed Kathrada, the former political prisoner incarcerated with Mandela for twenty-six years; 'The scenes of jubilation, the spontaneous outpouring of celebration following FIFA's decision, the solidarity of pride and unity evoked by a sporting event should serve as a shining example to black and white alike'.²

As the football world governing body acknowledged, the game in South Africa captures the attention of millions of participants and spectators. In the era of segregation and apartheid, it humanized the lives of people with little to cheer about and helped propel the anti-apartheid struggle internationally. Today, boosted by satellite, broadcast, print and

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electronic media, football generates huge revenues (at the elite level) and informs ideas about race, ethnicity, nation, class, gender and age. The premise of this collection, then, is that football matters in South Africa. The 2010 World Cup, the first to be held on African soil, is loaded with political, economic and symbolic significance for a democratic and globalising South Africa. The events of 2010 also present us with opportunities to inform and change how academics and laymen and women think about, relate to, interpret, understand, and discuss South African football.

Firmly situating South African teams, players, and associations in the international framework in which they have had to compete, this interdisciplinary collection sheds new light on the country's remarkable transformation from a pariah in world sport to the first African host of a World Cup. It examines how and why football influences, and is influenced by, cultural values, economic interests, and power relationships. The objective is to provide diverse perspectives on how and why men and women, rich and poor, black³ and white, urban and rural, organised, played, and watched football from the colonial period to the present. The themes of race and racism, class, gender, identity formation, mass media, and globalisation bind the project together.

The editors have assembled a diverse, international team of contributors from Africa, Europe, and North America. The majority of contributors are South African (at home and overseas) because it is crucial local academics to shape the production of knowledge about themselves and their societies, though in engagement with informed researchers from abroad. The authors represent disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, including African studies, anthropology, sociology, history, political science and media studies. The methodologies employed in this collection are interdisciplinary. Documents

in government archives and private collections, as well as newspapers and magazines in mainstream and alternative media, were extremely valuable in exploring various aspects of South African football. Oral interviews continue to be critical in complementing the preponderance of state perspectives and establishment views contained in archival and media sources. These testimonies play an especially important role in the research process, as they humanize individuals' experience of sport, reveal emotional dimensions and the hidden struggles within football—political, personal, social, or a combination of these.

South African Football Studies: An Overview

The output of academic studies of football in South Africa has been inversely proportional to the game's relevance in South African society. Beginning in the mid-1970s, football captured the attention of many humanists and social scientists in Europe, North America, and Australasia. Scholars publish, research, and teach about football at universities, where research centres, professional organizations, and academic journals devoted to the game have also been established. In contrast, 'South African universities were relatively slow in joining this new trend', historian André Odendaal observes.⁴ Intellectuals in African universities and scholars overseas also took a long time to recognize the need for football (and sport in general) to be studied both for its own merit and for its utility in social analysis.⁵ 'It is puzzling and paradoxical,' football ethnographer Bea Vidacs wrote only a few years ago, 'that the topic has not gained more legitimacy in and out of African studies in light of people's interest in sports'.⁶

It is striking to note the limited number of academic (and non-academic) works on South African football. A major reason for the underdeveloped state of soccer scholarship in this country is a neglect of the game in intellectual and academic circles. As has been noted elsewhere⁷, many conservative and progressive scholars find football (and sports) research superficial and banal; the former dismiss it as the embodiment of ‘low culture’, while the latter denigrate it as an ‘opium of the masses’, a distraction from engaging with truly pressing concerns such as poverty and class struggle, environmental degradation, gender inequality, unemployment, homelessness, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, crime, corruption and so on. Moreover, those few resourceful scholars who publish on South African sport continue to emphasize cricket and rugby, rather than soccer.⁸ This imbalance is owed in part to academics’ personal interests but also to the availability of funding for research and publication thanks to investments made by sporting bodies (esp. cricket), with support from government agencies and corporate sponsors. Finally, the scarcity of documentary evidence which held back sport research in South Africa, has egregiously harmed football—the black majority’s favourite sport. During the apartheid era, clubs and associations sometimes did not compile and store records for fear of police repression, and for lack of funds, infrastructure, staff, and initiative.⁹ All too frequently, the records of black football organizations disappeared, were lost or destroyed. Some enterprising researchers did overcome these gargantuan challenges to produce pioneering works on football. In his 1963 sociology master’s thesis on African voluntary associations in Durban, the Zulu-speaking black intellectual Bernard Magubane explored the close relationship between football and urban African society. By trawling the precious minute books of the Durban and District African Football Association and

conducting numerous oral interviews with its officials, Magubane demonstrated that, despite the racial and economic shackles of apartheid, football was enormously popular in black communities where it was imbued with political, social and cultural meaning. Two decades later, Robert Archer and Antoine Bouillon's *The South African Game* meticulously dissected apartheid sport and outlined the complicated racial and ethnic balkanization of domestic football. In the 1980s, the History Workshop at the University of Witwatersrand reinterpreted South African history and from this revisionist effort emerged two important essays on football: Tim Couzens' brilliant synthesis of the diffusion and development of the game in cities, mines, and villages; and Ian Jeffrey's penetrating case study of Sharpeville, south of Johannesburg, a black township where football crystallized neighbourhood identities, stoked rivalries and fuelled the rise of 'patron managers': local entrepreneurs who used football to construct patronage networks, accumulate small fortunes, and acquire social honour. A handful of popular accounts on football, mostly by South African journalists and former professional players, have also enlivened the literature on South African football.¹⁰

Peter Alegi's *Laduma! Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa* represented the first academic monograph on football in the country. Drawing from archival research and interview material in particular, Alegi demonstrated how indigenous sporting traditions impacted on the development and spread of the game amongst black South Africans. His analysis of the social and political history of soccer in South Africa highlighted the multiple forms of adaptation, struggle and resistance employed by administrators, officials, players and fans. Recent academic work on South African football has included

the politics of stadium construction, the struggle over apartheid at FIFA and football identity amongst others.¹¹

Since the turn of the 21st century, a number of important books on African football have appeared.¹² Paul Darby's highly praised *Africa, Football and FIFA* examined the continent's place in soccer's global order. Gary Armstrong and Richard Giulianotti's enlightening collection *Football in Africa* presented rich case studies on the history and social meanings of the game in fifteen nations. FIFA's voluminous *Le Football en Afrique* (written by Paul Dietschy and David-Claude Kemo-Keimbou) recently chronicled the institutional development of the game. This growing interest in African football extends to mainstream academic journals such as *Afrika Spectrum* and *Politikon*, both of which recently published special issues devoted to football.¹³ Finally, articles on football account for nearly half of the articles published in the first three issues of *Impumelelo: The Interdisciplinary Electronic Journal of African Sports*, an exciting initiative launched in 2004 by the new Sports in Africa programme at Ohio University in the United States.¹⁴ Cumulatively, this diverse body of Africanist work has produced new specialized knowledge that brings into stark relief football's centrality to modern African societies as well as Africans' active role in shaping the global culture of the game. If the three-chapter long treatment of Africa in David Goldblatt's magnificent tome, *The Ball is Round*, is any indication, it is no longer acceptable to write about the history and culture of global football without incorporating Africa and Africans fully into the analysis.

Structure, Content and Objectives of the Collection

This collection is divided into three parts. The first examines historical aspects of the game in South Africa, with particular attention to race, class, and gender dynamics in the twentieth century. The second part explores post-apartheid football through analyses of fandom, mass media, racial integration and labour migration. The third section examines the 2010 World Cup by focusing on political economy, cultural diplomacy, and critical voices of opposition to the mega-event.

In the first essay, sociologist Lloyd Hill explores the emergence of rugby and soccer as sporting codes in South Africa. Hill provides a comparative analysis of the social diffusion of rugby and soccer in South Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This analysis pays particular attention to the national education system and, drawing from Pierre Bourdieu, distinguishes between the diffusion of technical innovation and the ‘accumulation’ of a cultural code that reinforced white exclusionary practices. The whites-only South African Football Association was formed in 1892 and institutionalised segregation in football. In the second study, sociologist Chris Bolsmann traces the development, domination and decline of white football in South Africa. He argues that white football was more significant and popular than generally acknowledged and that it was at the forefront of globalising football in the early twentieth century. His historical analysis of elite white football reveals how local football authorities challenged the domination of rugby and cricket sports in South Africa between the 1890s and the 1940s. Bolsmann then examines the challenges of professionalism and anti-apartheid football in the 1950s and early 1960s, and the failed 1967 policy of ‘multi-nationalism’ which eventually led to the demise of elite white football in 1977.

The next study is historian Peter Alegi's biography of Darius Dhlomo—a football pioneer and star from Durban who was one of the first black South African footballers to play in Europe. Drawing primarily on interviews with Dhlomo, as well as archival documents, and articles from the black newspapers and magazines, Alegi shows how Dhlomo's career between the mid-1940s and the early 1960s captures key aspects of South African football's broader changes. This transformation can be understood in terms of a racially segregated amateur game evolving into an increasingly mixed semi-professional sport (despite apartheid), one enmeshed in globalisation processes as demonstrated by international tours and labour migration. Part one closes with sociologist Cynthia Pelak's socio-historical study of women's football and its imbrication with issues of race, gender, class, and power. Based on oral interviews, participant observation, and archival documentation, Pelak traces the rise of the organised women's game in the 1970s, its gradual growth in the 1980s and transformation in the 1990s thanks to the influence of feminism and democratisation. She concludes with a consideration of the changing racial demographics of women footballers in the post-apartheid era and the institutionalisation of the women's game after 2001.

In part two, the collection turns to contemporary issues that confront South African football. African Studies scholar Marc Fletcher explores race and racial discourse among South African fans. Fletcher's ethnographic case studies of supporters' club branches of Kaizer Chiefs—the most popular team in the country—and Manchester United in Johannesburg reveal sharp class and racial cleavages in South African fandom. He argues that such divisions are entrenched through perceptions of black 'ownership' of the domestic game and separate spheres of support for black and white fans. Fletcher

contrasts this separation with the anomalous, yet interesting, case of supporters of Bidvest Wits. This Johannesburg team has a small fan base, but what is unusual is that it is primarily white. Fletcher draws attention to the ways in which football in South Africa is more racially and ethnically diverse than generally acknowledged. Fandom remains the focus of the next study in which media scholar Sean Jacobs presents an autobiographical analysis of his associations with local and foreign teams while growing up in the 1980s in Cape Town. Contextualizing his discussion within the apartheid media landscape and its impact on fandom, Jacobs describes the origins of his obsession with English football and Liverpool loyalties and, in the process, candidly reveals his complicated relationship with South African football.

In the next study, sociologist Sylvain Cubizolles addresses the issue of restructuring of soccer in rugby's heartland: Stellenbosch. Employing an ethnographic method, Cubizolles' study highlights the contestations, contradictions and challenges that confront post-apartheid football administrators. It demonstrates how well-intentioned directives from the South African Football Association to unify different football associations in Stellenbosch have proven problematic due in part to the struggle for playing space in a rugby-dominated town. He also argues that parochialism and tensions inherited from the apartheid past remain issues of concern for local administrators and authorities. He concludes that fiercely local identities are heightened when certain clubs and organizations feel threatened and that race remains a hurdle in restructuring and unifying football in post-apartheid Stellenbosch. The subsequent study shifts the focus from the local to the transnational, with a comparison of national leagues and migration in Ghana and South African by sport studies scholars Paul Darby and Eirik Solberg. Based on

ethnographic fieldwork in both countries, their analysis investigates player migration in a comparative framework. Darby and Solberg argue that divergent levels of professionalism and football development in Ghana and South Africa have a strong impact on patterns of player mobility. Their analysis highlights the attraction of South Africa's Premier Soccer League (PSL), perhaps the richest league in Africa, for many of the continent's young professional footballers, including those with European aspirations. Darby and Solberg underline that the PSL helps South Africa avoid the underdevelopment of domestic football witnessed in Ghana and elsewhere as African footballers dream of moving abroad and becoming another Didier Drogba or Michael Essien. In so doing, the authors argue that a healthy and viable domestic football infrastructure is essential in curtailing this muscle drain. They also posit that the 2010 World Cup will consolidate South Africa's position as a key destination of African football labour migration.

Part three focuses on the 2010 World Cup. Political scientist Scarlett Cornelissen takes a political economy approach to evaluate the impact of commercial, corporate and political forces on 2010. Cornelissen maintains that international sporting mega-events are driven by profits and that host nations have little leeway in determining how these events play out—particularly over the long term. By examining the role of brands, mass media and ticket allocation in the commercialisation process, her study predicts that it is unlikely that the South African authorities will achieve their World Cup objectives. Historian Sifiso Ndlovu's contribution underscores the importance of the political history of sport in South Africa. The experiences of the sport boycott movement (and the apartheid regime's reactions), Ndlovu argues, informed post-1994 South Africa's use of sport

diplomacy to assert the country's 'African-ness' and to project its 'soft power'.

Academic analyses of the 2010 World Cup, according to Ndlovu, must historicize the role of sport in the politics of the ANC, both as a liberation movement and then as democratic South Africa's ruling party. By doing so, the link between 2010 and the principles underpinning the nation's foreign policy will be made clear.

Sociologist Ashwin Desai and historian Goolam Vahed build on the studies of Cornelissen and Ndlovu but take them a step further by analysing the pan-African rhetoric of 2010. These authors maintain that the much-touted economic spin-offs of the tournament have been exaggerated. South Africa's sub-imperialist role in Africa, according to Desai and Vahed, raises serious questions about the benefits African states will supposedly receive from the 2010 World Cup. Moreover, their study points out that so far that lucrative 2010-related government contracts have provided economic advantages to 'old' white capital and the 'new' black elite. Desai and Vahed are sceptical about whether this 'African' World Cup will challenge the unequal power relations in global football, but they conclude that the 2010 World Cup is a 'perfect opportunity to bring the politics and economics of soccer back into the public domain'.

This 'opportunity' is vigorously taken up by historian Percy Ngonyama who interrogates a range of alternative voices in the debates on the 2010 World Cup. Drawing on a rich set of interviews with representatives of social movements, trade unions, political parties, and non-governmental organisations, Ngonyama contends that class inequalities have become more pronounced within (rather than between) racial groups in post-apartheid South Africa and that, as a result, the 2010 World Cup will not bring substantial improvements to the lives of the poor and disadvantaged. The 'voices from below' differ

on many aspects of 2010, but agree that the exorbitant expenditures on the tournament make the project elitist and are a serious misdirection of public funds. Ngonyama makes the case that it is necessary to move beyond nationalist and Pan Africanist debates and critically engage with how the 2010 World Cup can perpetuate or possibly challenge existing economic and social divisions in South African society.

As these studies about the game's history, sociology, culture and political economy make clear, South African football deserves far more attention from scholars than it has received. *South Africa and the Global Game* builds on exciting developments across the disciplines to show how football offers a rich vein for further scholarly analysis on a number of important topics and themes. Ultimately, the aims of the editors and contributors are twofold. First, we demonstrate the multiple ways in which football can yield new facts and fresh insights into the history of colonialism, segregation, apartheid and the struggle for liberation. Second, we connect South Africans' passion for the game to larger processes of identity formation and reformation; commercialisation, commodification, and labour migration; urban sociability and popular discourses; and the role of mass media and the transnational aspects of the contemporary game. The 2010 World Cup is poised to change the way the world sees South Africa and its diverse people and, perhaps, how South Africans perceive themselves and each other. This collection provides evidence of how football can explain South Africa, or at least certain important aspects of the country.

Notes

¹ The authors wish to thank Peter Limb for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this essay. All interpretations are ours.

² Kathrada, *Memoirs*, 371.

³ Unless otherwise noted, the term 'black' in this collection refers to people classified as African, Coloured, and Indian by the Population Registration Act of 1950 and subsequent amendments.

⁴ Odendaal, 'The Unfinished Business of the Past', 24.

⁵ There were, of course, exceptions within this overall trend. For early incursions into African football studies, see Scotch 'Magic, Sorcery, and football among Urban Zulu'; Clignet and Stark, 'Modernisation and football in Cameroun'. No chapters on football were included in Baker and Mangan, 's pioneering collection, *Sport in Africa*.

⁶ Vidacs, 'Through the prism of sports', 335.

⁷ For example, see Vidacs, 'Through the prism of sports', 336.

⁸ Booth, *The Race Game*; Black and Nauright, *Rugby and the South African Nation*; Merrett and Murray, *Caught Behind*; Odendaal, *The African Game*; Grundlingh Odendaal and Spies, *Beyond The Tryline*; Desai et al., *Blacks in Whites*. However, there is a chapter on soccer in Nauright, *Sport, Cultures and Identities*. In thirty years, a mere handful of articles on South African soccer compared to over thirty on rugby were published in the *South African Journal for Research in Sport, Physical Education and Recreation*.

⁹ For more details, see HSRC, 'Final Report on the Sport and Liberation Archives Collection Project'.

¹⁰ By way of example, Thabe, *It's a Goal!*; North, 'Kaizer Chiefs'; Sello, *Chiefs: 21 Glorious Years*; Blades, *The Rainbow Game*; Auf der Heyde, *Has Anybody got a Whistle?*; Mazwai, *Thirty Years of South African Soccer*; Friedman, *Madiba's Boys*; Raath, *Soccer Through the Years*; Mokone, *Kalamazoo*; Abrahams, *Surviving African Football*; and Landheer, *Roger De Sa*. On earlier accounts of white football, see Granger, *The World's Game Comes to South Africa*; Litchfield, *Goals in the Sun and Cape Town City*; and Firmani, *Football with the Millionaires*.

¹¹ Alegi, "'A Nation to be Reckoned With'"; 'The Political Economy of Mega-Stadiums'; "'Like Cows Driven to a Dip'"; and "'Feel The Pullin Your Soul'" Darby, 'Stanely Rous's "Own Goal"'; Desai, 'Citizenship and Cosmopolitanism'; Kunene 'Winning the Cup but losing the plot?'; Bolsmann and Parker, 'Soccer, South Africa and Celebrity Status'.

¹² In the 1990s, chapter-length studies and journal articles on African football, past and present, advanced the field in crucial ways. By way of example, see Martin, 'Colonialism, Youth and Football in French Equatorial Africa'; Stuart, 'Players, Workers, Protestors'; Fair, 'Kickin' It'; Nkwi and Vidacs, 'Football, Politics and Power in Cameroon'; Sarro, 'The Generation Game'. For more published sources, see Baller, 'Bibliographie "Fußball in Afrika"'.

¹³ *Afrika Spectrum* is the journal of the German African Studies Association; *Politikon* is the journal of the South African Association of Political Studies. In 1998, the online journal *Mots Pluriels* (1996-2003) published a special issue on football in Africa, edited by André Ntonfo (University of Yaoundé), with articles in both French and English; open access to the archived journal is available online at: <http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP698index.html> (last accessed April 7, 2009). It should also be noted that articles on African soccer have also appeared in, among others, *International Journal of the History of Sport, Soccer and Society*, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, *African Studies*, *Journal of Modern African Studies*, *Africa*, and *Africa Today*.

¹⁴ More details about *Impumelelo* and 'Sports in Africa' are available online at: <http://www.ohio.edu/sportsafrica/> (accessed 8 April 2009).

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